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4th Sunday in Lent
Sermons
April 3, 2011

JOHN 9:1-41 - "BLIND FROM BIRTH"

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Close your eyes and keep them closed. What do you see? Nothing. Things are dark, nothing is in view. Perhaps at best you can detect directions and areas that seem brighter than others. But you cannot see. You can't see me or anyone else here. You can't even see your own hands if you hold them in front of your face. You can't see and this is exactly what blindness is, the inability to see anything. Please keep your eyes closed.

Even though you can't see now because your eyes are closed, there are still images in your mind, images of the things that you were seeing before I told you to close your eyes. With eyes closed you can still picture things in your mind. You can picture where I am positioned speaking to you. You can picture the clothes you are wearing. You know the color of the sky today and you have seen the sun. You know what your face looks like and you know what the faces of the people here look like; you know the face of your husband and wife, child, mother and father, sister and brother, and friends. Why? How is this possible? Because you all have had the ability to see things all your life and your present blindness is only temporary. Now open your eyes.

Sight is a wonderful gift of God, one that we who can see often take for granted. Much of our thinking and interactions in life are based upon the ability to see. Try to imagine if you were suddenly struck blind and could not see for the rest of your life. How would your life change? Now try to imagine how different your life would be if you never had the ability to see, imagine what your life would be like if you had been born blind!

Some people are born blind. Some people never get to experience the visual world we live in. Some people never get to look their loved ones in the face ever, because they are blind from birth. Jesus approached just such a man born blind from birth in our text. This man had never seen another human being nor himself; he had never seen the sun, moon, or stars. He never had the ability to see, he could not see, because he was born blind.

But why? Why are some people born blind? Why was the man in our text born blind? Why are some people born with no ability to hear? Why are some people born with no ability to speak? Why are some people born with heart defects? Why are some people born missing vital organs? Why are some people born with sickness and diseases? Why we ask? Who is to blame, what is the reason?

People in our culture today might answer these questions in one or more of the following ways: Bad luck of the draw; there is no reason, it just happens to some people; God is punishing the child's parents or is punishing the child; or God has some plan or purpose in it to be discovered. When things like this happened in 2nd Temple Judaism and the rest of the ancient world, when people suffered various tragedies and afflictions it was always assumed that the person afflicted or his parents had done something wrong to displease God or the gods and was thus being punished for certain sins done.

This was exactly what popped into the minds of Jesus' disciples when they saw the man who was born blind and they asked Jesus about. ¹ And passing along He saw a man blind from birth. ² And His disciples asked Him saying, "Rabbi, who sinned, this one or his parents, that he was born blind?" The disciples assumed what just about everyone in their culture would have assumed and even what people in our culture today assume, that some great sin or sins were done by someone and this was God's punishment.

As a pastor I get asked questions like this from time to time and I did just this past week, "Pastor, why do you think the tsunami has devastated Japan, what have the Japanese people been up to," or "Pastor, do you think New Orleans was hit hard by Katrina because of all the sin down in the French Quarter?" There has to be a reason why these devastating natural disasters happen; there has to be a reason why birth defects happen. Someone has to be someone at fault. There has to be a reason why the man was born blind.

Jesus' answer to His disciples is unexpected and not even an answer as to the cause of the man being born blind from birth. ³ Jesus replied and said, "Neither this one sinned nor his parents, rather that the works of God might be manifest in him. ⁴ It is necessary for us to work the works of the One who sent Me while it is day; when night comes no one is able to work. ⁵ When being in the world, I am the Light of the world." ⁶ After He said these things He spit on the ground and made clay from the spit and He anointed him with the clay upon his eyes ⁷ and He said to him, "Go wash in the pool of Siloam" (which translated means 'sent'). Then he departed and washed and went seeing."

Jesus makes clear what was not the cause of the man's blindness; He does tell His disciples that the man's blindness from birth was not because of some horrible sins that he did (or would do) or that his parents had done. God was not carrying out special punishment against this man nor his parents nor anyone. But Jesus never says here what the cause was. Instead Jesus directs His disciples' attention to the present purpose at hand, to the works His heavenly Father had sent Him to do as the Light of the world, works that even the disciples would do in Jesus' name. Jesus wanted their attention focused upon the new creative act that He was about to do! Jesus took the things of the earth, dirt and His own spit, and He made mud or clay to anoint the man's eyes. Jesus took the things of the earth, water, and by His Word told the man born blind to wash in the pool of Siloam and the man washed and he could see. Jesus gave sight where there was only blindness! Jesus overcame the man's blindness; Jesus gave the man new eyes to see, through His Word, water, and clay!

Jesus did what only God can do. Jesus acted powerfully and creatively to give the man born blind sight for the very first time. The man born blind now had a whole new life seeing. No longer was he stuck in darkness forced to beg from others for his livelihood. Now he could move about freely and see! It is no wonder that his neighbors and others who had watched him begging found it incredible, hard to believe that this was the same guy that they had known always as the blind from birth beggar. He was like a new man. They all naturally wanted to know how this change happened to the blind man, if indeed it was really the same guy. 8 Then the neighbors and those watching him formerly because he was a beggar said, "Is he not the one who sat and begged?" 9 Some were saying that, "It is him", others were saying, "No, rather it is someone like him. He was saying that, "It is me." 10 Therefore they began to say to him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" 11 He replied, "The man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and spoke to me, "Go into the Siloam and wash;" therefore I went and washed and I received sight." 12 And they said to him, "Where is He?" He said, "I do not know."

Jesus had acted powerfully and creatively, but who is Jesus and where was He from? These are the questions that are asked throughout John's Gospel; these are the questions that the Apostle John wants the reader/hearer of his Gospel to ask. These are the questions that people in the 1st century asked as they encountered Jesus, His Word, and His signs. However neither people of the 1st century nor any reader/hearer of John's Gospel is able to arrive, find, or deduct the answer to these questions, the truth is hidden; sinful humanity is in the dark. When it comes to spiritual things, when it comes to who Jesus is and where He is from, all humanity is blind from birth.

13 They led him toward the Pharisees, the one who was formerly blind. 14 Now it was the Sabbath on the day Jesus made clay and opened his eyes. 15 Therefore again the Pharisees also asked him how he received sight. And He said to them, "He placed clay upon my eyes and I washed and I am seeing." 16 Therefore some from the Pharisees began to say, "This man (Jesus) is not from God, because He did not keep the Sabbath." But others were saying, "How is a man, a sinner, able to do signs such as these?" And a division was in them. 17 Therefore they said to the blind man again, "What do you say concerning Him, since He opened your eyes?" And he said that, "He is a prophet."

Who is Jesus? Is He from God or from the devil? This was the debate the Pharisees had in their own ranks. Some argued that Jesus had done what can only be done by God's power; give a man born blind his sight. Others were convinced that Jesus was a sinner, from the devil, because in their eyes Jesus had broken the Sabbath by doing work that was forbidden (they actually thought that it was unlawful work to anoint a man's eyes with clay, tell him to wash, and give him sight). What is clear is that just like Nicodemus, a Pharisee and ruler of the Jews, and just like the Samaritan woman at the well, neither the Pharisees nor even the man born blind knew who Jesus was nor where He could be found; they were all spiritually in the dark, blind.

Where does this spiritual blindness come from? From sin, from Original Sin. Since the Fall all Adam and Eve's children are blind from birth spiritually; this means that no sinful human being can see, understand, or believe the things of God. Just as the man born blind could not give himself sight, so too no sinner can give himself spiritual sight. Only God, only Jesus, only the Holy Spirit can do such things! But Original Sin is the great disease of humanity and the cause of all particular birth defects,

sickness, diseases, particular sins, and death. As St. Paul writes in Romans 6:23, "The wages of sin is death."

Verses 18- 34 of our text demonstrate three things to us: first and most important, the spiritual blindness of all; second that because Jesus had graciously given the man born blind his sight, Jesus was also graciously healing him of his spiritual blindness; and third in contrast to the man born blind, the spiritual blindness of the Pharisees only becomes more dark.

18 Therefore the Jews did not believe concerning him that he was blind and received sight until they summoned his parents, the one who received sight 19 and they asked them saying, "Is this your son, what do you say, that he was born blind? Then how does he see now?" 20 Therefore his parents replied and said, "We know that he is our son and that he was born blind. 21 But now how does he see, we do not know, or who opened his eyes we do not know; ask him, he is of age, he can speak concerning himself." 22 His parents said these things because they feared the Jews; for already the Jews had agreed that if someone confessed Christ, then he would be cast out from the synagogue. 23 On account of this his parents said he is of age, ask him.

24 Then they summoned the man who was blind a second time and they said to him, "Give glory to God; we know that His is a man, a sinner." 25 Then he replied, "If He is a sinner I do not know; one thing I know, that I was blind but now I see." 26 Then they said to him, "What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?" 27 He replied to them, "I spoke to you already and they did not hear. Why do you wish to hear again? You don't also wish to be his disciples?" 28 And they insulted and said, "You are His disciple, but we are disciples of Moses; 29 We know that God has spoken to Moses, but this One we do not know where He is from." 30 The man replied and said to them, "For in this is a marvel, that you do not know where He is from, and He opened my eyes. 31 We know that God does not hear sinners, but if someone is God-fearing and he does His will, this one He hears. 32 From the ages it was not heard that someone opened the eyes of one born blind; 33 if He is not from God, then He is not able to do anything." 34 They replied and said to him, "In sin you were born completely and you teach us?" And they cast him out.

What the Pharisees said of the man blind from birth was true; he was born in utter sin, but so too were they. The Pharisees, the man born blind, us and all people since the Fall are born in Original Sin and as a result we are all spiritually blind from birth. The great irony of our text is that the man born blind whom Jesus gave sight to gradually gained spiritual sight as he continued to give witness to what Jesus had done for him, but that the Pharisees, who could see physically, grew darker in their spiritual blindness every time witness to Jesus' works were given. In their blindness, the Pharisees cast the man out; they were disciples of Moses, but not this Jesus.

As before, Jesus had compassion on the man who was blind from birth. Jesus sought out and found the one whom the Pharisees cast out and He drew him to Himself and revealed who He was to him so that he might have spiritual sight and believe. 35 When Jesus heard that they cast him out also He found him and said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" 36 He replied and said, "And who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?" 37 Jesus said to him, "Also you have seen Him and the One who is speaking with you is He." 38 And he said, "I believe, Lord;" and he worshiped Him. 39 And Jesus said, "For judgement I have come into the world, in order that those not seeing may see and those seeing might be blind." 40 Those being with Him from the Pharisees heard these things and they said to Him, "Are we also blind?" 41 Jesus said to them; "If you are blind, then you do not have sin; but if you say that we see, then your sin remains."

Likewise, Jesus has had compassion upon you and your spiritual blindness from birth. Jesus sought you out and found you and drew you to Himself. Jesus revealed

Himself to you; He gave you spiritual sight in your Baptism. Jesus took the simple earthly element of water with His powerful and creative Word and forgave your sins; He open the eyes of faith, so that you might believe in Him. In the waters of Baptism Jesus connected you with His death and resurrection; His blood covers you and you are reconciled to the Father. Once you were blind, but now in Christ you see!

As those who can see by faith in Christ Jesus, let us ever humbly confess that on our own, we are all blind from birth. Let us confess our sin and be eager to receive the forgiveness of sins from Christ who was lifted upon the cross for our salvation. Let us receive His grace with joy and thanksgiving. For once we were all blind, but because of God's grace in Christ Jesus, now we see Amen!