

*Human Weakness, God's Glory*  
John 9:1-41  
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John 9:1-41:

*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 him 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 he 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 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.' 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 worshipped 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 him, '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.*

We all have a blind spot. Try this. Take the index card just given to you and close your left eye while staring at the "x" on the card. Now, move the card to the back and forth, and at some point you will not be able to see the dot.

It's called a scotoma, and it's the area on the retina without photoreceptor cells that respond to light on the optic disc where the optic nerve passes through. Because there are no cells to detect light on the optic disc, the corresponding part of the field of vision is invisible. Therefore, an image that falls on this region will not be seen. Kind of like if you plugged the power cable to the t.v. directly into the screen, it would create a blind spot there. A process in our brains fills in the blind spot based on surrounding detail and information from the other eye, so we normally do not perceive the blind spot.

We also have a blind spot in driving, right? I learned never to hang out around the blind spot of a car because they might switch lanes, not knowing I'm there. That's why I always, ALWAYS look over my shoulder before I switch lanes. Because the rear-view mirror has a blind spot, too.

A major part of the gospel lesson today is acknowledging that we have blind spots. This allows God to do God's work. Which is bringing light. If we think we have all the light we need, God's left out. God wants to be included. So if we can acknowledge, "There are some things I just can't see. There are some things I just can't hear. There are some things I just don't know," it's kind of like an invitation for God to come in and help. And God loves to help. Because that is how God is glorified.

The trouble is, we really don't like to acknowledge these things. That we can't see or hear or don't know. We think we know. We think our way is the right way, that our way is the only way.

In the Gospel passage, Jesus heals a man who was born blind, and because the healing was done on the Sabbath, the day of rest, the religious leaders start an investigation, calling the man's parents and ultimately throwing the man out of the synagogue. Jesus then teaches that he came to bring sight to the blind and to reveal the blindness of those who think they see.

The blind man, and those around him, know he can't see. Interestingly, though, after the blind man is healed by Jesus, some in the community of neighbors around him don't recognize him. They suddenly have a blind spot. "Isn't this the guy who used to beg?" they ask. "No, it's someone like him," some reply, even though he says, "I'm the man, I'm the man!" So, was he only identifiable by his blindness, or by his being a beggar? They must not have known or have thought about him in any other way.

They want to know how his eyes were opened, and he tells them who (Jesus), how (made mud and spread it on his eyes and told him to go to Siloam and wash), and what happened (he received his sight). Where is he, they ask. "I don't know," the man replies.

So the neighbors bring him to the Pharisees, the religious leaders, perhaps because they think maybe the Pharisees will know where Jesus is, or maybe they'll have some explanation. Like the disciples earlier in the passage, the Pharisees are concerned about sin. In those times, it was believed that if someone had a disability or disease it was the result of a sin committed by the person or the person's parents. Jesus tells the disciples this is absolutely not so. He is not blind because he or his parents sinned. It's completely unrelated. Let's be very clear on this point. The blindness, the disability, the disease, the difference, has no correlation to someone having sinned.

The Pharisees argue about whether maybe Jesus is a sinner because he healed on the Sabbath, and no one from God would work on the Sabbath. Like the neighbors, they're full of questions. "What do you say about him?" they ask the man. "He is a prophet," answers the man.

It is really important, it's crucial, to remember that everyone in the passage is Jewish. The man born blind is a Jew, his parents are Jews, the neighbors and Pharisees are Jews, Jesus is a Jew. This passage, which speaks of "the Jews" not believing that the man was blind and now could see and so called the parents for verification, is not incriminating Jewish people. It points out the traps, caveats, and limitations of religious authority. The writer emphasizes the hypocrisy that the Jewish law of the religious elite is being used to oppress the very people they are called to serve; that they have lost sight of the person because of the law. The law has created a huge blind spot.

Jesus loved the Jewish law, he stood by it and quoted it, lived by it – the writer is challenging the use of the law as a tool of divisiveness to oppress, control and punish. The arguments about the law divide them. And this still happens today in our religious communities. We argue over issues, and in the process, forget about the individual, the person, the human being. Jesus uses the law to love; the religious authorities that the writer of John calls, “the Jews,” use the law to separate.

I read this week about a woman named Sheila O’Bannon. Her son, the middle of 3 boys, was bullied at school growing up. His brothers had always told the mom that something was different about Aaron, who struggled socially and emotionally. He was always getting into fights because he was teased that he was gay.

The church he attended preached that God hated homosexuals, who were horrible people and were going to hell. Aaron decided he would end his life at age 14. The doctors who intervened at the hospital determined that Aaron was not gay, but transgender. He had felt trapped in the wrong body, the wrong gender, since age 3.

People were asking Sheila what was wrong with her that she would raise a child like that and blamed her. The boy was moved from the hospital to a psychiatric facility where the only visitors were the family and members of the church. The doctors told the mother to ask the church visitors not to come because the minister was telling the boy he was worthless and an abomination. The doctors said their comments were killing her son. The mother was the music director at the church, and the minister, while not asking her to leave, found her a new job at another church and encouraged her to apply.

This reminds me of the Bible passage. The parents are threatened that they will be kicked out, and then the formerly blind man is banished from the place of worship; because the religious leaders are unable to see the human being as the image of God, as the beloved child of God. They argue and contest and debate about the fine details of how and why and who and forget about God’s commandment to love one another; about God working in their very midst, healing and liberating. And they don’t notice that his healing is cause for celebration.

Sheila, the mother of Aaron, was in a dilemma. She couldn’t accept or believe this about her son, that he was transgender. The doctors said they didn’t care what she believed -- if she couldn’t provide a supportive environment for her son they would have him removed from her home, because he would surely try to kill himself again. She turned to God, prayed, and was led to various parent support groups where she learned from others who had gone through the same situation.

Once antagonistic towards the LGBT community, Sheila said began to reconcile with them. She learned that many were raised in the church and shared a common thread: all thought God hated them. In prayer one day, she heard a word from God:

“I don’t need you to judge these people. All I want you to do is tell them that I love them and point them in my direction.”

Sheila began by apologizing to her son and telling him God loved him. “How do you know?” he asked. *Because God told me.* The two have written a musical called *The Prodigal* about their journey, which opened to a sellout crowd in Louisville, Kentucky. Sheila eventually found a music ministry job at another church that was understanding and supportive of her situation, and members of their new church were in the front row. The mother believes it was love that saved the life of her child.

The road has not been easy. Similarly, the man blind from birth in the gospel passage who is healed is faced with new challenges. People cannot reconcile his new life as a seeing and non-begging man. He is rejected from the synagogue after finding new life.

There is a second healing in the gospel story, though. After the formerly blind man is kicked out of the synagogue, Jesus finds him. Jesus walks with him. Jesus continues to teach him about love, life and the Spirit.

Where are our blind spots? Where do we struggle and fight and resist the work of God? When are we disbelieving about miracles in our midst? What proof do we need that God can heal? Is there something in your life, that you feel is a weakness, that is holding you back? Can you invite God in, and believe that your weakness can be used for God’s glory?

We fear what we don’t understand. Let’s let go of the fear, of the struggle to be right, and love. Do you know the way to avoid the blind spot in our eye? Look at the card again and find the blind spot. Now open both eyes. Let’s open our eyes and let God in. And see what God does.

The good news today is that we are not meant to be flawless, nor do we need to judge others who are flawed. God works with our limitations by giving us strength where we are weak and revealing our weakness where we think we are strong. To God be the glory!