



March 19, 2023 John 9: 1-41 1 Samuel 16:13

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#### ENTERING THE SCENE:

We encounter Jesus confronting the conventional wisdom once again. His own disciples ask who sinned, assuming blindness was a punishment for someone's sin. Once cured the man becomes the focus of intense conflict. But he slowly and very surely he claims his truth. He was blind, but now he sees. Lent can become a similar process for each of us. Slowly, but surely we begin to see what needs changing or strengthening. We too need to be able to say "this man is from God"

Jn. 9:1-41

1 As he went along, he saw a man **blind from birth**. 2 His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, **who sinned**, this man or his parents, that he was **born blind**?" 3 Neither this man nor his parents **sinned**," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. 4 As long as it is **day**, we must do the work of him who sent me. **Night** is coming, when no one can work. 5 While I am in the world, I am the **light** of the world." 6 Having said this, he spit on the ground, **made some mud**

with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. 7 Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means Sent). So the man went and washed, and **came home seeing**. 8 His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, "**Isn't this the same man** who used to sit and beg?" 9 Some 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 demanded. 11 He 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.

13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who had **been blind**. 14 Now the day on which Jesus had **made the mud** and opened the man's eyes was a **Sabbath**. 15 Therefore 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**." 16 Some of the Pharisees said, "**This man** is not from God, for he does not keep the **Sabbath**." But others asked, "How can a **sinner** do such miraculous signs?" So they were divided. 17 Finally 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**."

18 The Jews 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**. 21 But 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." 22 His parents said this because they were **afraid of the Jews**, for already the Jews had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ would be **put out of the synagogue**. 23 That was why his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

24 A second time they summoned the man who had **been blind**. "**Give glory to God**," 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 man** 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**. 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. 39 Jesus said, "For **judgment** I have come into this world, so that the **blind will see** and those who see will **become blind**."

40 Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, "What? **Are we blind too**?" 41 Jesus said, "**If you were blind**, you would not be **guilty of sin**; but now that you **claim you can see**, your **guilt remains**."

**DISCUSSION QUESTION:** The people ask Jesus are we blind too? What would Jesus answer you

**PRAYER:** Lord, you invite me to see ever more each Lent where my blind spots are. You assure me that seeing is freedom even though it may bring new abilities to respond and therefore more responsibilities. Help me to be like the man in this scripture to see that each challenge to my truth is an opportunity to reaffirm my new awareness. Amen.

## WORD STUDY AND QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:



### **BLIND FROM BIRTH / BORN BLIND / BEEN BLIND / WAS BLIND / BLIND**

**WILL SEE:** These words move us from blindness to sight. This is the point of the story. Jesus began his ministry proclaiming that this was his calling. (Lk. 4:18)

*In what ways are you moving from blindness to sight this Lent? How can this story help you do this?*

### **WHO SINNED / SINNER / STEEPED IN SIN AT BIRTH / BECAME BLIND / ARE WE BLIND TOO? / IF YOU WERE BLIND / GUILTY OF SIN:**

It was believed that all misfortune was the result of sin. The task then was to discover the cause of the sin in order to remedy the misfortune. (See Job)

*Have you ever thought, "They got what they deserved" when a misfortune happened to someone who hurt you? How can this blind you to seeing what is really going on? In what ways can this help to blame the victim? Have you ever been on the receiving end of such a belief?*

**DAY / NIGHT / LIGHT:** The people's whose presumptions darkened their ability to see the new revelation of God in Jesus are now given the light to see.

*Do you have any inadequate understandings of God that keep you in the dark and blind you to what is being revealed? If so, what are they?*

**MADE SOME MUD / SABBATH / NOT FROM GOD:** No work can be done on the Sabbath, even if it is to help someone in need. This was all the proof the Pharisees needed to confirm their own truth about Jesus.

*Why is it so easy to hold on to things that help you reaffirm what you already believe, when it is obvious to others that there is a problem with that understanding? What purpose does this serve?*

**CAME HOME SEEING / NOW I SEE / CLAIM YOU CAN SEE:** We move from receiving sight, to claiming the gift of sight, to challenging those who claim to see.

*What gifts have you been given that call you to more insight? Has this then challenged others as well?*

**ISN'T THIS THE SAME MAN / I AM THE MAN:** Those who wish to remain 'blind' would like to think that this wasn't the same man so that they could remain the same.

*Have you ever received an ability to see something that others wished you didn't? If so, how did you handle it? If it was tough, have you ever wished that you could have remained blind?*

**I DON'T KNOW / WE DON'T KNOW / I DO KNOW:** The man and then his parents are questioned. The parents prefer to stay ignorant, where the man does not.

*How does the persistence of the questioners help the man move deeper into his truth? Have you ever had opposition/hostility help you to clarify your truth? How?*

**EYES HE OPENED / CAN SEE / SEE NOW / OPEN YOUR EYES / OPENED MY EYES / OPENING THE EYES / YOU HAVE NOW SEEN:** These words move from sight to insight.

*Has this study time helped you to do the same?*

**IS THIS YOUR SON / AFRAID OF THE JEWS:** The Pharisees' question is designed to instill fear.

*How do you feel when someone comes at you with a question that you know is not what it seems on the surface?*

**PUT OUT OF THE SYNAGOGUE / THREW HIM OUT / THROWN HIM OUT:** When this gospel is written, people who believed that one could be a believer in Jesus as the Messiah without becoming first a full Jew under the law, were excommunicated. They could no longer participate in the Synagogue activities. This often meant losing family, job, home, everything.

*Does this help to explain the parent's behavior?*

**GIVE GLORY TO GOD / GUILT REMAINS:** Another way to admit guilt was to “give glory to God”, in other words, proclaim that you accept the guilt and repent of it. The man does give glory to God when he bows down to Jesus. Those who have claimed to be guiltless, find their guilt remains.

*What enables the man to move beyond the belief that sin was the origin of his problem? Why do you think the others refused to see?*

**YOU DID NOT LISTEN / JUDGMENT:** Not listening to Jesus brings on the Pharisees’ own judgment.

*Have you ever done this to yourself? If so, was this a course in compassion for you?*

**BECOME HIS DISCIPLES / THIS FELLOW’S DISCIPLE / DISCIPLES OF MOSES:** To be a disciple means that you are under the instruction of someone. The Pharisees claim Moses as the last word, and the man experiences Jesus as the freshest word.

*What enables you to remain open to fresh new insights about God’s love for you?*

**DON’T EVEN KNOW WHERE HE COMES FROM:** The questioners hurl back this retort when the man calls them into honesty. They in effect shout; “don’t disturb us with the facts”.

*The man’s insight shows him where Jesus comes from. Has this story helped you to do the same?*

**GODLY MAN / SON OF MAN / LORD I BELIEVE:** Once again, we have a story that moves us from an entry level faith (Moses) to a graduate level faith (Jesus).

Are your Lenten practices/reflections helping you to prepare for graduation (Easter)?



**PARALLEL TEXTS:** Jn. 9:1f // Is. 42:7; Jn. 9:3 // Jn. 11:4; Jn. 9:4 // Jn. 11:9f; 12: 35f; Jn. 9:5 // Jn. 8:12; Jn. 9:6 // Jn. 5:11; Mk. 7:33; 8:23; Jn. 9:16 // Jn. 3:2; Mt. 12:10f; Lk. 13:10f; 14:1-4; Jn. 9:22 // Jn. 7:13; Jn. 9:23 // Jn. 12:42; Jn. 9:31 // Jn. 10:21; Jn. 9:37 // Jn. 4:26; Jn. 9:39 // Mt. 13:13f; Jn. 9:40 // Mt. 15:14; 23:26; Rom. 2:19;

**OTHER TEXTS OF THE WEEK:** 1 Sam. 16: 1, 6-7, 10-13; Ps. 23:1-6; Eph. 5:8-14; Jn. 9:1-41;

Revised Common Lectionary: 1 Sam. 16:1-13; Ps. 23; Eph. 5: 8-14; Jn. 9:1-4

(The Man Born Blind by Carl Heinrich Bloch: 1834-1890

Fossum, Jarl. Understanding Jesus’ Miracles. [Bible Review](#): April 1994, Pages 16ff.)

#### **SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION:**

In the Mediterranean cultural world, everyone minds everyone else’s business. Life is lived in the open, in the public eye, and privacy is practically nonexistent. (See Lk. 4:42). It would be impossible to live in such a world if one could not keep at least some part of one’s personal life hidden from others. This is where secrecy, deception, and lying come into play. Families try to keep family matters hidden or secret within the inner sanctum of the home. Deception and lies are strategies regularly used to keep information from others (see Jn. 7: 1-10). The culture permits and expects children to try to snoop out the truth (see Mt. 19: 13-15) by wandering in and out of the adult world. At the same time, adults instruct their children never to report the inner workings of their own family while snooping on others.

Pilch, John J. [The Cultural World of Jesus-Cycle A](#). The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN. 1995. Page 59.



Jerusalem As Mosaic (Madaba map: Made of over 700,000 ceramic tile; covers part of the floor of a church in Madaba, Jordan)

Jerusalem, for Byzantine Christians, was the center of the earth and the focal point of spiritual experience. They built churches to commemorate events, such as the healing of the blind man in John 9. In the left corner of this map (No. 12) there is a church that was built in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, under the Empress Eudocia to make the site of the pool. Today a mosque stands on the site of the Byzantine church, and only a small piece of a wall and cornice from the church can still be seen. (Bible Review: 3-4/1988, Pages 44-6)

What happens in this story is, in a manner of speaking, the opposite of the sin against the Holy Spirit. The blind man is presented by John as not being particularly bright, as not being very religiously keen, and as being essentially disprivileged in terms of opportunity to recognize Christ. Yet, in John's gospel, he is one of the first persons to clearly recognize Jesus for who he is and make a profession of faith. And he moves toward that faith through one singular virtue, he refuses to lie. Simply through his honesty, he is led to God. That simple honesty is a rudimentary mysticism that brings about faith. **It**, alone, can take one to God. Pg. 228:  
Rolheiser, Ronald. [The Holy Longing](#). NY. Doubleday. 1999.

In an article "The Siloam Pool" by Hershel Shanks [Biblical Archaeology Review](#). 9-10/2005. Pgs. 16ff you will find pictures of a recent uncovering of part of the steps of the pool.

For examples of the truism that God does not answer the prayer of sinners see: Micah 3:4; Is. 1:13; Ps. 66: 17-19; Prov. 15:29; Job 22: 23-27 & 27: 8-9)

Contemplative prayer is the preference for the desert, for emptiness, for poverty, for the dark unknown path of aridity. Out there, there are no landmarks, no visible paths. One must ultimately let go of everything within oneself, leave all ways for the one way, Christ. It is a participation in his saving death and resurrection. Thomas Merton

Letting God in as God presses closer to me. He does not always remain bent over his pages: he often leans back and closes his eyes over a line he has been reading again, and its meaning spreads through his blood. Rilke

"Throughout my whole life, during every moment I have lived, the world has gradually been taking on light and fire for me, until it has come to envelop me in one mass of luminosity, glowing from within. . . The purple flush of matter fading imperceptibly into the gold of spirit, to be lost finally in the incandescence of a personal universe... This is what I have learnt from my contact with the earth --- the diaphany of the divine at the heart of a glowing universe, the divine radiating from the depths of matter a-flame..." *The Divine in the World* -- Teilhard de Chardin

What you are looking for is what is looking. St. Francis of Assisi

Just as a man cannot see things that come into view around him without continually moving his eyes back and forth; in the same way, a mind that does not move continuously from one concept to another will not understand the truth of things at their deepest level. Abdelkader: Algerian hero-patriot of 19<sup>th</sup> century)

One climbs, one sees. One descends, one sees no longer, but one has seen. There is an art in conduction oneself in lower regions by memory of what one has seen higher up. When one can no longer see, one can at least still know. Reme Daumal

Progressiveness is looking forward intelligently, looking within critically, and moving on incessantly.  
Wallso Pondray Warren

For example, in the ninth chapter of John's Gospel there's the long story of the man born blind. Never in his whole life had he been able to see, and then suddenly Jesus meets him. When the man says, "Grant that I may see," Jesus cures his blindness. The event, as John recounts it, is really a sign. He's reminding us that all of us are born blind and are blind until we begin to see with the light of faith. Then we really can see, but it's only with faith that we see fully.  
Bp. Thomas Gunbleton

Seeing into darkness is clarity...This is called practicing eternity...Lao-Tzu P-14 (3175)

There must be an emptiness to see; to listen there must be quietness. Krishnamurti

#### **SUGGESTED READINGS:**

Grana, Janice. [Images](#). St. Mary's College Press, Winona, MN. 1976. **COLORS** : Page 14.  
de Mello, Anthony. [The Way to Love](#). Doubleday, NY. 1992. **THE BLIND SEE**: Pages 35-36.  
Shea, John. [Stories of Faith](#). Thomas More Press, Chicago. 1980, **MAN BORN BLIND**: Pages 191-193