

SERMON TEXT FOR LENT 4A

PREACHED MARCH 26, 2017 AT ZION LUTHERAN, ENOLA PA

TEXTS: John 9.1-41; 1 Samuel 16.1-13; Psalm 23; Ephesians 5.8-14

"Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" his disciples ask Jesus as they pass by and see a man **blind** from birth. It **had** to be one or the other, they thought. That was the **only explanation** that made any **sense** to them. (Of course, they knew nothing of **genetics** or **science**, only about God.)

".. who sinned, this man or his parents?" This is what people **believed** about illness and calamity in Jesus' day. If someone was born **blind** or with **leprosy** or some other illness, or a woman was unable to have **children**, it was because of **sin** - the person's or someone else's. If someone was **rich** it was because they had been **blessed** by God, and if they **weren't** it was because God had not **found favor** with them. All of the **good** - and the **bad** - that happened in one's life was the result of **sin**.

Like I said, this was the thinking in **Jesus'** day. But have we really moved **that far** from those thoughts even today? We certainly fall into the **blame game**, don't we? You know the blame game: someone or something always has to be to **blame** when bad things happen. Our world functions on **cause and effect**: because **this** occurred, the end result or outcome was **this**. From presidential **politics** to **medical** malpractice, **games** won or lost, and **jobs** earned or those that slipped through our fingers - we look for those to **blame** when things don't go our way. (And we expect that they will get what's **coming** to them as **punishment**.)

But Jesus **breaks** this line of thinking. **Sin is not the culprit**. No one sinned. The man was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. No blame. No fault. Just an opportunity for **God** to be seen and known.

So, as I said, Jesus and his disciples encounter this man, and Jesus decides to **heal** him - despite the fact that it is the **Sabbath**. So with a little **mud** and some **spit**, followed by a good **wash** in the pool of Siloam, the man is **healed** to see and experience the world - and **Jesus** - in a **new light**.

Miracle of miracles! He can see! Let's **rejoice**! But **is** there rejoicing? Is there even a **hint** of a **mention** of rejoicing in this story? **NO!** Instead what follows is this **back and forth** about whether, in fact, the man had been born blind, who **healed** him and how, and what the healer's **qualifications** might be.

I've got to be honest here: the ones who come out looking the **worst** in this story are the ones who look just like **me**. That's right, it's the **religious authorities** (the Pharisees) who fall all over themselves trying to verify **who** healed the man, **how** it occurred, **who** is the guilty party for the blindness in the

first place, whether the man was even blind from birth, and just who this Jesus guy is.

It's almost a **comedy of errors** scenario. Back and forth they go trying to get the **real story** and making sure that all is **legitimate** - which they were **sure** it wasn't. They keep asking the man: "Just how did you receive your sight? What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" The man's response never changes and is **simple** and **straightforward**: "*One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.*"

About **Jesus** they ask: "How can a man who is a **sinner** [because he healed on the Sabbath] perform such signs?"

And to the man's **parents**: "What do you say about him?" "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How does he now see?" They acknowledge that this is their son but decline to say how he was healed.

Here's the **irony** of the story: **the religious authorities are too blind and stubborn and conceited about their own positions to see God's work and God's grace in the healing of the man. The man does**, though, and he lets the Pharisees in on what he has **learned** from this encounter - and is not afraid to **chastise** them in the process.

"Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he [Jesus] 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." To be sure, **the man's vision** - and not just the **physical** sight - had been **completely restored**.

But those Pharisees **did not like being challenged** in their thinking about Jesus. They responded, "*You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?*" [How dare you!] "*And they drove him out.*"

The **Pharisees** might have had enough of him for one day, but **Jesus** wasn't done with the man. Jesus wanted to be sure that the once-blind man would now **see exactly who and what he was**. So he **sought** him out and made sure that his identity and his purpose were clear.

Unfortunately, the religious authorities did not get **either** of those things. They had **blind spots** that even **they** couldn't see. But **we** should not be too quick to **criticize** them for their blindness. **We've got blind spots too - all of us.**

- How about those places in our lives that we might be **embarrassed** to admit if brought into the light?

- How do our **prejudices** affect our desire for **all** to have access to a decent education, affordable health care, a job that pays a living wage?

- When does our **self-centeredness** and our lack of trust in God prevent us from **sharing our plenty**?

These are just a **few** of our blind spots. I'm sure we could find more.

All of the **onlookers** in this story have blind spots too. They fail to see that **God is doing a new thing through this healing miracle**. Neighbors, Pharisees, parents - they all can see that Jesus has restored the man's **sight** - yet they all fail to see it for what it is. They are all **blind** in one way or another to **Jesus, the light of the world**. It is only the **man** who was once physically blind who can see Jesus for who he is: the Son of Man who has come to bring sight and light to this world.

This story of healing challenges us to recognize ways in which we are blind and cannot recognize our own blindness - and the ways in which we are **wrong** about the blindness of **others**. As Jesus reminds us in the Sermon on the Mount, *"how can you say to your neighbor, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' while the log is in your own eye? First take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye."*

Through Jesus Christ, the blind man saw the light. He believed and confessed that Jesus is the Son of God. May **we, too**, live in the **light** and confess that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, our Savior, our Redeemer, our Light.
AMEN