

Sunday, March 15, 2026
Fourth Sunday in Lent (Year A)

John 9.1-41

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“I Was Blind, Now I See”

We are roughly halfway through this year’s Lenten quest. Each Sunday during this quest providing us with a Gospel account of an individual who has a life-changing encounter with Jesus. These individuals, transformed, become our guides on our own Lenten quest, as we, like them, seek to discern and to live more fully into who we are created and called to be as beloved children of God. Each guide providing insights and lessons that will, hopefully, transform us not just for the forty days of this current Lenten season, but for our entire lives. So far, our guides have been somewhat unlikely choices: Nicodemus, a high-ranking Jewish official who is also a secret follower of Jesus; and Photini, a Samaritan woman of questionable repute. Each, thus far, providing us with lessons about living more fully and more boldly into our lives of faith and to embrace more fully what it means to be children of God and members of the Body of Christ.

Today, we meet another unlikely guide: a man born blind. Although, unlike our previous guides, this guide is not alone. His role as our guide is informed by awkward dialogue, both metaphorical and actual, with Jesus’ own disciples and a group of Pharisees. The man born blind serving as a guide in his own right, but that role being further highlighted and informed by how his transformation is in opposition to, is in defiance of, the prevailing attitudes and ideas of both the disciples and the Pharisees. Attitudes and ideas regarding sin. Attitudes and ideas that are ultimately misplaced and misguided. A classic match-up of an outsider bumping up against insiders—in this case, of two competing camps. With the outsider coming out ahead as the only one of the lot qualified to serve as our guide.

Enter today’s guide: the man born blind. Upon seeing him, Jesus’ disciples ask, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Reflecting an ancient perception that affliction is punishment for sin. Be it the sin of the individual or sin of one’s parents or other ancestors. Hence the disciples’ question. A notion that Jesus promptly rejects: “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him.” Here it is important to issue a huge caveat. In saying that the man was born blind “so that God’s work might be revealed in him” does not in any way imply that God caused the man’s blindness to provide a way for God’s works to be revealed. That God causes any affliction, pain, or suffering as a jumping off point for God’s glory to be manifest would just be cruel. No, that is not who God is. That is not how God operates. The reality is that things happen. People are born blind for a variety of reasons. People suffer afflictions for inexplicable reasons. But certainly not to give God a platform for showing what God can do. No, what Jesus means is that even in the midst of inexplicable situations of affliction, pain, or suffering, God’s work can still be done. God’s glory, God’s love, God’s grace, God’s mercy, God’s compassion, can be revealed through such situations when approached with an open mind and an open heart. And done in ways that may not otherwise be possible. Or as readily apparent.

God’s work being revealed may be in ways other than physical healing. Other forms of healing and reconciliation can occur through such seemingly inexplicable and tragic situations and

conditions—be it mental, emotional, spiritual, relational, even societal. Just think of a more modern example: that of Helen Keller. Despite being blind and deaf from infancy, she became a disability rights advocate, political activist, author, and lecturer. While not healed physically, her life, her work, and her example revolutionized our understanding and treatment of people with disabilities. Certainly an example of God’s work being revealed in her, if there ever was one. And perhaps, God working in and through her did provide healing in some deeper way.

Undoubtedly out of compassion for the man born blind, but also as a way of showing just how his infirmity was not due to sin, but rather as an opportunity for God’s work to be revealed in a powerful way, Jesus proceeds to heal the man. We have other instances of Jesus healing people with just a word. But here, Jesus makes more of a production out of the healing process. “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.” In these actions—spitting on the ground and making mud and having the man wash the mud off in the pool of Siloam—Jesus is making a significant theological statement. Making mud from his spittle and the dirt of the ground beneath his feet calling to mind God’s creative work in Genesis chapter 2: “then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being” (Gen 2.7). God forming man out of dust. The same dust that mixed with divine spittle would heal another man’s blindness. Not only sending a message about Jesus’ divine origin as the Son of God, but also effectively creating a new life through the healing of the man born blind. That in his old life before being healed, the man did not have much of a life at all, being relegated to begging for what he needed to survive. Now, he is given new life, he is a new creation, in the fullness of his being, with endless possibilities before him.

An indication of that new life is also provided in the second step in the healing process: to “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam.” That is no accident, having the man wash the mud off in that specific pool, whose name means “Sent.” Having the blind man begin his new life by washing away the signs of the old evokes images of baptism, the act that would come to be the means of entry into new life in Christ. The sacrament of baptism itself being a form of commissioning, of being sent out into a new life, a new way of being. The name of the pool in which this occurs, itself being called Siloam, being called “Sent,” indicating that the once blind man, in his new life, is being commissioned as one who is sent, one who is called to be an apostle. The term “apostle” meaning a “person sent forth.” The once blind man, now healed, now brought into new life, now commissioned to be one sent out to proclaim the good news of God’s glory as revealed in Jesus, does just that.

Enter the Pharisees. When they investigate the healing of the blind man, they already start from a biased position: “This man,” referring to Jesus, “is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.” And “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” Already at odds with Jesus and his interpretation of Jewish law and practices, the Pharisees and temple authorities have been looking for ways to discredit and even condemn Jesus. They have found him guilty and are now looking for evidence to substantiate the verdict. The once blind man is just such evidence, Jesus having healed him on the sabbath, in opposition to Jewish laws against doing any “work” on the sabbath. Healing as work on the sabbath was perhaps debatable, but the fact that Jesus made mud to enact the healing was indeed considered work. So, even if they could not successfully argue about the healing itself, the kneading of mud was the irrefutable

proof they needed. And if Jesus is guilty of breaking laws about keeping the sabbath holy, he certainly could not be from God, as many believed. The greater threat to their authority and the real reason they wanted to get rid of him.

The Pharisees have already made up their minds that there is no way Jesus could be from God. They are blind to the possibility of such a notion. And yet, the once blind man, in his testimony, clearly sees that Jesus is from God, proclaiming, "He is a prophet." Despite his testimony and the evidence presented, the Pharisees continue in their blindness as to who Jesus is. Turning instead to their credentials, that they are disciples of Moses, so they must be right. The once blind man, emboldened by what he knows to be the truth, by the divine grace he has experienced through his healing, goes toe-to-toe with the religious authorities: "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." This uneducated man, because of the experience of God's grace, the proof of God's love, proves to be more of a teacher, more theologically savvy, than the temple authorities.

To which the Pharisees turn more petulant: "You were born entirely in sins, and you are trying to teach us?" Their eyes will never be open to the truth, not even when presented with irrefutable proof. After being thrown out by the Pharisees, the once blind man has his first encounter with Jesus since being healed. Jesus asks him, "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." The healing itself provided not only physical sight, but the beginnings of spiritual sight, as exhibited in his encounter with the Pharisees. Here, in this second encounter with Jesus, his spiritual sight, like his new physical sight, is made complete.

The once blind man had been, and still is, one who stood outside the bubbles inhabited by Jesus' disciples and the temple authorities. The disciples being distracted by questions of blindness as an indication of potential sinfulness. The temple authorities bogged down in literal interpretations of the law and whether Jesus violated sabbath restrictions, with the resulting question as to the perceived validity of the healing that occurred. Both the disciples and the temple authorities locked in restrictive ways of thinking that prevented them from seeing—that caused them to be blind to—the possibilities for God's love and grace to be manifest through the man born blind. To seeing how God might actually work through one such as the once blind man. All the while the once blind man now seeing in ways the disciples and the temple authorities were unable to. As he himself noted upon being healed, "though I was blind, now I see." Not only was he physically blind, but had been given sight, he had also been spiritually blind but had gained spiritual sight as to the truth of God's love manifest in a tangible way. A bonus to be sure. One that enabled him to truly live into the role of one sent out to proclaim the gospel. One uniquely qualified to demonstrate how God's work can indeed be revealed even in and through unfortunate, even tragic, circumstances.

The example and the testimony of the once blind man is an invitation to us on our own Lenten quest and in our life's journey to seek to move beyond narrowly prescriptive images of who God is and how God operates. An invitation to be open to seeing the truth and the power of

God's love even in the midst of seeming impediments: physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, relational, or societal. Recognition that God can and does work through life's circumstances, to bring healing, whatever form that may take. And in the process, bringing transformation and giving new life.