

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Lent – Year A - March 27, 2011 – Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY

Based on John 9 written by Pastor Paul Horn

### **Only the Blind Can See Jesus**

#### **I. The blind see**

#### **II. The seeing become blind**

You might be wondering what the picture on page 9 of the bulletin is all about (see picture at end of sermon). Maybe you've seen this picture before. Maybe not. Here's what I'd like you to do with it. Relax and focus your eyes on the 4 small dots in the middle of the picture. Just keep staring at the dots without taking your eyes off them for about 30 seconds. Now look over at the wall. You should see a circle of light developing. Blink your eyes a couple times. What do you see in the circle? Or maybe I should say, whom do you see? You should see a picture of Jesus. Did it work for you? Can you see Jesus?

Let me ask you now to put the picture aside and direct your eyes back up here and think about the question again. Can you see Jesus? I'm not talking now about the black and white picture of Jesus you saw on the wall. I'm talking about seeing Jesus as your Savior from sin. Can you see Jesus? We learn from today's Gospel in John that only people who are blind can see Jesus. Doesn't make sense, does it? It's another paradox, another statement about Jesus that seems contradictory. But it's true and will become clearer as we study this portion of Scripture together. We pray: Lord, open our eyes that we may see wonderful things in your Word. Amen.

It was a Sabbath day – Saturday in Jesus' time. As Jesus and His disciples were walking from the temple for worship they came across a man who was sitting along the side of a path begging. Perhaps the man looked up at Jesus as He walked by. But, of course, he could not see Jesus. He could not see anything because he had been blind from birth. This prompted an interesting question from Jesus' disciples. **“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”** Their question reflected a common belief in those days, as we still find today, that every suffering is a punishment from God for some particular sin. In this case the disciples were perplexed because if the man's blindness was a punishment for his own sin, then it had to be a sin he committed before he was born – which, in their minds, would be impossible. On the other hand, if a sin committed by his parents was the cause of his blindness, it did not seem fair that he should suffer for their sin.

Jesus refocuses their attention not on the cause of the blindness, but he purpose. God allowed him to be born blind so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. What does that say about the sufferings God allows us to have? They are intended to bring glory to God. Jesus brings glory to his Father by mixing mud with his spittle and puts it in the man's eyes and has him wash in one of the pools on the southern edge of Jerusalem. Why doesn't Jesus just say the word and restore the man's sight? It's hard enough to reach into the psyche of the human mind much less tap into the mind of God and understand why he does things the way he does. Jesus had his purpose.

The man now sees for the first time in his life. Just imagine... the walls of the temple he had felt with his hand, he could now see. The rushing waters of the Jordan River as it flowed south toward the Dead Sea, which he

had only heard and felt before, now he could see. The sound the olive trees made as the wind rushed through it on the Mount on the east side of Jerusalem, he could now see. The birds he heard in the sky, he could see! He could behold the wonders of God's creation for the first time!

But this was not the greatest work God did on that man. The man still had a bigger problem that needed to be cured. Although Jesus had given this man his sight, he could still not see Jesus for who he really was, the Savior of the world. He could now see, but he would continue to stumble around in darkness of his sin and unbelief, all the way to hell, unless Jesus spared him from that fate. And he wanted to...

Jesus went and sought that man out. And He asked him, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" The Son of Man was a reference to a prophecy from Daniel. In other words Jesus was asking, "Do you believe in the promised Savior?" (You see, but not really. Let's refocus on what's most important.) "Yes," the man replied, "I want to know who he is so that I may put my trust in him." Imagine the man's eyes growing big as dinner plates when Jesus said, "I am he." Jesus removed that man's spiritual blindness and replaced it with the light of faith. Another miracle... more astonishing than the first!

I'm not sure how many people afflicted with blindness at birth. One study I read stated that less than 1% of all people in the world are born blind. Contrast that with a statistic you won't find on Google - 100% of people are born spiritually blind. Like the man in the story, each and every one of us was born blind, blind to God, blind to his Word, blind to the Savior's cross. None of us could see Jesus for who he really is. Each of us was ignorant of his love for us and we really didn't want to know. Like the man, you and I were destined to stumble in blindness of our sin all the way to our graves and then to hell.

But Jesus performed a miracle on you. Just as he washed the man's eyes he washed you with water at baptism. The power of Word of God in baptism cut through darkness of sin in your heart, allowing the light of Christ to shine. The light of Christ washed away the blindness of sin, which kept you from seeing him. By God's grace, he performed surgery on you. Not LASIK or laser surgery. He implanted a new set of eyes in you; the eyes of faith. Where the blindness of sin once ruled, faith now sees Christ clearly. Faith sees Jesus obeying God's commandments perfectly. Faith sees Jesus dying on the cross. Faith sees the empty tomb. Faith sees heaven waiting for you.

Not only does your faith see Christ, it is faith that reaches out and receives all that Christ has done for you. Through faith you receive Christ's perfect obedience. You are sinless and holy through faith. Through faith you receive Christ's punishment on the cross. Your sins are forgiven through faith. Through faith you receive Christ's resurrection. You have the assurance that you will step out of your grave, through faith.

All this is done because of God's love for blind sinners. Just as Jesus sought out the blind man, he searched for you and me, because of his love to save, his love to make the blind see, and that is why we sing, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me, I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see." It was the blind man's song, it is yours and mine too.

What about the other blind men in the story? Did you notice them? They may not have jumped off the page, because they were not physically blind, and secondly, they didn't think they were suffering from spiritual blindness.

Have you ever met someone who didn't think they were blind or deaf? I know a pastor, who during his days at the Seminary worked for a church, visiting homebound members. One lady was in her 90s and she still lived in her own home. But this Seminary student had to sit on the couch next to her and yell into her ear when he gave the devotion and administered the Lord's Supper. She thought her hearing was fine, but she remained deaf for all practical purposes.

This is what the Pharisees thought of themselves. They thought they could see just fine. They had their salvation all figured out. They depended on obeying God's law. They didn't need a Savior because they had themselves. But they showed they were blind in the way they questioned each other about Jesus. They did not understand what it meant to obey God's law. The heart of the law is love for sinners. They did not understand love for sinners. Jesus sums up their actions, **"For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind."** They were unable to see Jesus as Savior. A paradox, a contradiction, made clear through Jesus' words.

How is your eyesight? Is it deteriorating? Sure, with old age, unless you have laser surgery on your eyes. But I'm talking about your spiritual sight. Will it deteriorate? It's very possible... it's important that we talk about it, because Jesus talks about it. In the gospels he issued many warnings to "watch and pray so that you don't fall," because he knew about the darkness of this sinful world and your own sinful nature...

The sinful world offers us things like materialism... the love of possessions and money and "stuff." We become so wrapped up in obtaining material things and needed and wanting more that it becomes a cloud of darkness that hides Christ and his cross from our eyes of faith. The sinfulness of the world offers hedonism – the love of pleasure. Not just sensual or sexual pleasure, but any type of pleasure, your leisure time or rest time; time for me. This becomes a shadow that hides our faith from Christ. Even something as simple as our worries over our own health or our anxieties over the well being of a loved one... Worry and anxiety are really unbelief, because they cast a shadow over God's promises.

The Problem comes in when we don't think this is a big deal. We think we can see, when in reality, we are allowing the clouds of this world and our sinful nature to cast a shadow over the Gospel. Then we will no longer be repentant of those sins, because we won't think they are sins. Then we will longer look to Jesus for forgiveness, and Jesus will fade away, much like the image you saw on the wall.

Lent is a good time to pull out the eye chart of God's Word and give yourself a check up. How far have we strayed? Am I guilty of allowing my sinful nature and all the sinful world has to offer? Yes, I am guilty of that. But don't stop there. Look to Christ. See his cross. Behold the beauty of his crucifixion, where he was punished for your sinfulness, where he carried the load of your sins of worry and anxiety. Listen to the cry of sins forgiven on Good Friday, "It is finished!" Look forward to the beauty of his empty tomb on Easter Sunday – his guarantee that the Father accepted that payment. Behold the beauty of the font, where through water

and Word he gifted all these to you. When you return to his Word and Sacrament, you will clearly see his promises.

That's why, this Lenten season, you will sharpen your vision by making worship on Sunday, or Wednesday a priority, devotions at home a priority. There you will see your sins clearly, but most importantly, you will see Christ clearly, and his cross, where he washed them all away.

The picture of Jesus you saw on the wall was clearest and brightest right after you spent time focusing on the image of Jesus on the bulletin cover. As we take time during Lent to focus on Jesus and His Word, I pray that you see more brightly and clearly than ever that He is your Savior from sin and your sure hope for eternal life. Amen.

