

March 26 2017

## Reading from the Bible Luke 4:16-21

**John 9:1-42** (*The Message*) Choir members joined Rev. Becky in reading this portion of Scripture:

**Narrator:** Walking down the street, Jesus saw a man blind from birth.

**Disciples** asked: “Rabbi, who sinned: this his man or his parents causing him to be blind?”

**Jesus** said, “You’re asking the wrong question. You’re looking for someone to blame. There is no such cause-effect here. Look instead for what God can do. We need to be energetically at work for the One who sent me here, working while the sun shines. When night falls, the workday is over. For as long as I am in the world, there is plenty of light. I am the world’s light.

**Narrator:** He said this and then spit in the dust, made a clay paste with the saliva, rubbed the paste on the blind man’s eyes, and said.

**Jesus:** “Go and wash at the Pool of Siloam.”

**Narrator:** (Siloam means “Sent”) The man went and washed- and saw. Soon the town was buzzing. His relatives and those that year after year had seen him a blind man begging were saying.

**Speaker #1** “Why isn’t this man we knew, who sat here and begged?”

**Narrator:** Others said **Speaker #2** “It’s him all right!”

**Narrator:** But others objected, **Speaker #3** “It’s not the same man at all. It just looks like him.”

**Narrator:** He said **Blind Man** “It’s me. I’m the very one.”

**Narrator:** They said **Speaker #1** “How did your eyes get opened?”

**Blind Man:** “A man named Jesus made a paste and rubbed it on my eyes and told me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash,’ I did what he said. When I washed I saw.”

**Speaker #2:** “So where is he?”

**Blind Man** “I don’t know.”

**Narrator:** They marched the man to the Pharisees. This day when Jesus made the paste and healed his blindness was the Sabbath. The Pharisees grilled him again on how he had come to see. He said, **Blind Man:** “He made a clay paste on my eyes, and I washed, and now I see.”

**Narrator:** Some of the Pharisees said, **Pharisee #1** “Obviously, this man can’t be from God. He doesn’t keep the Sabbath”

**Narrator:** Others countered, **Pharisee #2** “How can a bad man do miraculous, God-revealing things like this?”

**Narrator:** There was a split in their ranks. They came back at the blind man,

**Pharisee #1** “You’re the expert. He opened your eyes. What do you say about him?”

Narrator: He said. **Blind Man:** “He is a prophet.”

**Narrator:** The Jews didn’t believe it, didn’t believe the man was blind to begin with. So they called the parents of the man now bright-eyed with sight. They asked them.

**Pharisee #2** “Is this your son, the one you say was born blind? So how is it that he now sees?”

**Narrator:** His parents said. **Parent #1** “We know he is our son, and we know he was born blind. But we don’t know how he came to see—haven’t a clue about who opened his eyes.

**Parent #2** Why don’t you ask him? He’s a grown man and can speak for himself.”

**Narrator:** ( His parents were talking like this because they were intimidated by the Jewish leaders, who had already decided that anyone who took a stand that this was the Messiah would be kicked out of the meeting place. That’s why his parents said “Ask him. He’s a grown man.”) They called the man back a second time---the man who had been blind----and told him.

**Pharisee #1** “Give credit to God. We know this man is an impostor.”

**Narrator:** He replied, **Blind Man:** I know nothing about that one way or the other. But I know one thing for sure: I was blind...I now see.”

**Narrator:** They said **Pharisee #2** what did he does to you? How did he open your eyes?”

**Blind Man** “I’ve told you over and over and you haven’t listened. Why do you want to hear it again? Are you so eager to become his disciples”

**Narrator:** With that they jumped all over him.

**Pharisee #1** “You might be a disciple of that man, but we’re disciples of Moses. We know for sure God spoke to Moses, but we have no idea where this man even comes from.”

**Narrator:** The man replied **Blind Man.** “This is amazing! You claim to know nothing about him, but the fact is, he opened my eyes! It’s well known that God isn’t at the beck and call of sinners, but listens carefully to anyone who lives in reverence and does his will. That someone opened the eyes of a man born blind has never heard of ever. If this man didn’t come from God, he wouldn’t be able to do anything.

**Narrator:** They said, **Pharisee #2** “You’re nothing but dirt! How dare you take that tone with us!”

**Narrator:** Then they threw him out in the street. Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and went and found him. He asked Him, **Jesus:** “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”

**Narrator:** The man said, **Blind Man** “Point him out to me, sir, so that I can believe in him.”

**Narrator:** Jesus said, **Jesus:** “You’re looking right at him. Don’t you recognize my voice?”

**Blind Man:** “Master, I believe. **Narrator:** The man said, and worshipped him. Jesus then said, **Jesus** “I came into the world to bring everything into the clear light of day, making all the distinctions clear, so that those who have never seen will see, and those who have made a great pretense of seeing will be exposed as blind.”

**Narrator:** Some Pharisees overheard him and said, **Pharisee #1** “Does that mean you’re calling us blind?”

**Narrator:** Jesus said **Jesus:** “If you were really blind, you would be blameless, but since you claim to see everything so well, you’re accountable for every fault and failure.”

### **Sermon: “Define Blind”**

Pharisees said, “There goes that man, Jesus, going around converting other people and he called us blind. How can he call us blind, we are the Pharisees, we know more than anybody around. We are learned and Jesus is insinuating that we are blind guides. What happens when a blind man leads another blind man and they fall into a pit?”

Jesus noted they were preoccupied with the externals but not with the heart issues. Isaiah’s prophecy was being fulfilled in the presence of the people. The Messiah would be the one to make the blind see.

The world didn’t pay much attention to blind beggars and the Pharisees didn’t do much more than that. Of course it was good to give alms, to give money to blind beggars. But one blind beggar was the same as another blind beggar. The Pharisees probably didn’t recognize this man even though he sat and begged every day. They were lot more concerned about the Sabbath. They debated endlessly about all the rules for the Sabbath. And Jesus had broken the Sabbath rules not by healing but by kneading the mud with his fist and that kneading was considered work. The Pharisees were good at making rules. They had it nailed down as for as keeping or breaking the laws for the Sabbath and they were going to make Jesus pay. They were going to knock down the story of the healing of the blind man as best they could.

The disciples asked about the generational thing, who was to blame for the man’s blindness-his parents or grandparents. And that was also the debate of the day and even today there are some who believe that somehow it is the fault of the parent or grandparent that a person is disabled. Jesus refused to get derailed; he was the master of staying focus on what was important. The rabbit trail of generational sin

was not what this miracle was about. Jesus was the master of redirection and they were to give God glory.

Someone interpreted this story was that God made the man blind so that at this moment he would be made whole. I find that very hard to believe, that God would condemn a person to years and years of blindness for just this moment. What Jesus did say, "He is blind and he has been blind but this is the moment that the glory of God will be shown. If you look at the scripture carefully, the Pharisees were questioning the blind man and saying "Give glory to God and tell the truth that this man didn't heal you or you weren't the same blind man or it wasn't a miracle especially not on the Sabbath. But Jesus meant for the healing to give glory to God. As we watch the story unfold the blind man goes from Wow. "I can see but I don't know how he did it, to a little bit of sarcasm; to a little taunting of the Pharisees. "Do you like him so well that you want to follow him" and in the end the blind beggar becomes whole spiritually.

I wonder about the parents of this man. I wonder what it was like to have a child born blind. Apparently in the middle-East blindness is very, very common especially among adults. A lot of adults become blind because of flies, infections and all kinds of things. Just think sometimes a child was born without an eye or a misshapen eye. You know how exciting it was when your baby was born and started exploring his body- feeling his toes and fingers. He watches your fingers- your baby tracks them and you rejoice. Maybe your baby can reach out for certain objects and not others. This baby didn't do any of those things. They didn't have tests in those days like they do today. Today when a baby is born blind completely blind -no sight- no vision or limited vision there are options. How sad it is when a baby is born without all the proper functions. I had friends who had a baby that was born with Cystic Fibrosis and immediately they thought about its short life and they thought about having no more children. They thought about all those heart breaking things and would not having a normal life. In the Bible story these parents probably wanted to dance for joy when their son was healed but they were afraid because of the Pharisees. This man had grown up with no future. Today in our modern western medical culture people with low vision or fully blind have options. They have readers; they have surgery; and they have glasses. By the way Ben Franklin did not invent glasses he invented bifocal glasses. An Italian invented glasses in the 1200s. That is the trivia for the day. The blind man had no hope; the only thing he could do was to beg. There were no sheltered workshops and no disability. He was probably fully healthy and could live a full life except for the people who kicked him or the people who made fun of him or whatever. He was totally dependent on his own.

One of the things I think is that Jesus as he went his way doesn't seek out the blind man. He doesn't plan for example on Sunday March 26 to heal a blind man. He

comes across this man and he sees this man begging. The blind man doesn't see Jesus. He doesn't even ask Jesus to heal him. Jesus doesn't ask him, "Do you want to see?" He just does it. Now I have always thought especially when I was in middle school Ugh! putting dirt in somebody's eye "But it was actually a magical kind of thing that people did in those days. There was some thought that was the way of healing. The blind man wasn't well yet but when Jesus said, "Go wash." He trusted Jesus and he went to the pool Siloam and washed his eyes. Can you imagine what it would be like to see the colors for the first time; to see your own hands and to see the people around you; to look at your fingers and then give God glory. Now his lack of a career and the lack of connection were ended.

The Pharisees enter the picture; they had watched this little interplay. It is so contemporary and so interesting. Today we are so worried about fact finding and fact solving in our world. It is so contemporary. "Yes, that is the man—no he isn't—he just looks like the man." There is a lot of humor in this story trying to debunk God's work by side stepping. In the New Testament Jesus heals several blind people but this is the only one that was blind from birth and was healed on the Sabbath. And Jesus reminds people that the Sabbath was made for people not people for the Sabbath. With our 2000 perspective of the Sabbath, it seems that would have been the perfect day to heal someone. What a wonderful thing to give somebody sight. The Pharisees were entrenched in their interpretation of the Commandment, Honor the Sabbath and keep it holy. And we don't know if the man was religious at the time- did he go to the synagogue or not? "But we know better," said the Pharisees and you deserve to be blind. No wonder Jesus commented on the blind leading the blind. The Pharisees were unwilling to discern the truth right in front of them or judge it rightly. Jesus said, "You are blind." Their blindness was real and they were unable to see the truth. They got it all wrong and irony of it all they failed to give glory to God. They said, "They knew this man was a great sinner so he couldn't be healed". Their logic is crazy. They said Jesus is a sinner he couldn't heal so the healing was not from God. So it had to be some other thing. And the blind man sticks to his story. He is not swayed by the Pharisees or intimidated by them. He sees through their deception and their "assumed godliness" The blind man is a creditable witness "I am the man and these are my eyes and I can see you and if you put something in front of me, I can tell what color it is. Give me a test. Ask me the questions." The power structure was really tipped in favor of the status quo. They were so sure. After the crowd was with the blind man the Pharisees placed his healing in their world value. Healing should never be done on the Sabbath. The healing can't be from God. The Pharisees told him he violated the Sabbath. They said "You a blind man, you do not know what you are talking about, but we, Pharisees know. But the man who experienced Jesus' touch knew more than these highly educated and influential

people. Why can't they celebrate the healing instead of trying to explain and condemn it? Then the blind man gets a little attitude and he taunts them. "What! Do you want to follow him too? Are you interested in him? You have been asking a lot of questions about him. And the Pharisees tell him you shut your mouth. Not in so many words and they did not say it that way but they pretty much meant that. The blind man stood up to them and they gave him the boot. In those days when you were kicked out of the synagogue it was drastic. You couldn't worship. You couldn't do sacrifices. You lost your sense of community. So here is this blind man wandering about after having been kicked out of the synagogue and is no longer welcome there. And Jesus comes to him and that is the tender part of the story. Jesus didn't just clean up his eye sight he gave him the opportunity to know Jesus' Lord.

It was a lot like story of the blind men and the elephant. You have probably heard the story before. The men are all blind and they touch the elephant. One touches the elephant's ear and says the whole elephant is big and flat. Another blind man touches the elephant's tail and says no-no the elephant has a tassel at the end; another touches his hoof no, no the elephant is hard as nails; another touches his tusk and says it is smooth and hard and none of them are right and all of them are wrong. They were blind and they were right somewhat, but they were so wrong they got the whole picture wrong.

It is a lot like Isaac Watts who wrote the song, *Amazing Grace*. He was the captain of the slave ship and became aware of how awful and wrong slavery was. The song *Amazing Grace* changed his life experience. "I once was blind but now I see" "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news."

The blind man was one of those who brought good news and joy. Jesus brought Good News but the Pharisees couldn't share the joy. They couldn't anticipate, they couldn't see beyond the status quo. They wanted to keep everything the same. And they wanted to keep it in their hands.

But what about us? Are we ever blind and don't see? Are there times when we don't want to see the truth? One commentator mentioned that there are times when we don't want to see the truth. The other one is wonderful no matter what family or friends say, no matter what we will find out five years down the road when we get used to that persons quirkiness everything is just wonderful. We don't want to see the faults in that person and it goes the opposite way we don't want to see the value of that person.

I heard a story about this little elementary or middle school kid's program that was made up of five ethnic students, three Spanish and two African Americans and they won the contest. It was their first time ever. And their competitors taunted them with racial slurs and told them to go back home to Mexico and Africa. And one little boy said when they asked him how he felt, "It's terrible but I'm just used to

it” Pray for the day when that person is not used to it. We need to see the heart and not the color of their skin. The Pharisees confused culture with what is God’s kingdom. Sometimes we think that whatever culture we are in is the best. If you read about the south in the 1960s when people were trying to register blacks to vote; you have to wonder, what were those people thinking if they would burn down a house of a person trying to register to vote or that they would lose their job because they dared as a black to register to vote? But it was the cultural norm was such that it just couldn’t happen we refuse to believe because it doesn’t suit our own religious experience we are stuck in a bottle that we have to explain everything. The older I get, the longer I have realized that there are a lot of things I don’t understand. I am more willing to give God the glory in some of those settings than maybe I was before. Some of us like the Pharisees are unteachable. We don’t want to hear it. We don’t want to know it so don’t give me the facts. Sometimes we reject the sinner who brings Good News and we close our eyes. I remember a woman who became a deacon in one of my earlier church. She was a wonderful person full of passion and she came out of the bar right into our church. What an amazing woman. A lot of people looked at her because she wasn’t like them she wasn’t professional, and she wasn’t rich. She was a bit rough around the edges. She was a sinner like any of us but she was Good News. Sometimes, we are so comfortable and so happy where we are; things are going so well, we don’t want to listen to another vision. We don’t want to be open to human need. We don’t want to speak out and find the people who have need of our touch. We want to remain in our little bubble. We continue with lack of compassion and our own prejudices. We are afraid to hold up the mirror to see our real selves. The blind man saw more clearly than the crowd, his parents and even the Pharisees. I was blind but I see and Jesus gave him true sight by revealing to him I am the Son of Man. I am the Messiah. Isn’t amazing that Jesus told people like that and others like the woman at the well and he went to Zacchaeus’ house for dinner. He said salvation has come to this house. Jesus stretches our imagination to have good word for one another from wherever we come from and maybe this week we will meet someone who will have an amazing good word for us. If we are open and we let Jesus open our eyes we will hear his voice. We will say, “I was blind but now I see.”

Gracious God give us eyes to see and hearts to love. Show us our blind spots Show us our prejudices that we might come closer to-walking the path you walked. We pray this in the name of Jesus.----Amen