

Born Blind — Rev. Denise Stone

Text: John 9:1–41

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH BIG FLATS NY, 03-07-2021

Today is the third Sunday of Lent. Today is also the 52nd Sunday of “COVID-Tide.” One year ago, some of us met in our Sanctuary for a socially distanced Worship Service and then, starting the following week, we went 100% online.

Over these past 52 weeks, we have learned about Zoom and Facebook Live and YouTube. We have learned and had to improvise ways to share our services digitally. We have (mostly) survived our frustrations with technology, and our frustrations with the virus and our frustrations with the divisions we have seen highlighted in our country and our world as the result of the shutdowns and continued social and racial injustices.

We are all weary from these past 52 weeks. We are all hoping the virus and shutdowns will be over very soon. We are all ready and looking forward to when we can return to worship in the Sanctuary. We ARE all weary and we are ALL looking for good news. Sometimes it is hard to see the good news in front of us.

Today’s Second Scripture Reading, the Gospel of John, Chapter 9, verses 1-41:

¹ As he walked 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 Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned;

he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. ⁴ We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." ⁶ When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, ⁷ saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. ⁸ The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" ⁹ Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." ¹⁰ But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" ¹¹ He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight." ¹² They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴ Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵ Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." ¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided. ¹⁷ So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet."

¹⁸ The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight ¹⁹ and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" ²⁰ His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; ²¹ but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." ²² His parents said this because they

were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. ²³ Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

²⁴ So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner." ²⁵ He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." ²⁶ They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" ²⁷ He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" ²⁸ Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹ We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." ³⁰ The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. ³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. ³² Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." ³⁴ They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" ³⁶ He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." ³⁷ Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." ³⁸ He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him. ³⁹ Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind." ⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" ⁴¹ Jesus said to them, "If

you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.¹

The Word of the Lord, **Thanks Be to God**

In this story we find the man who was born blind interrogated by the Jewish Religious leaders regarding his healing.

We find the man doubted by his community – people weren't even sure that the man was the same one they knew as the blind man. Even his parents seem to abandon him out of fear of the religious leaders.

Finally, the man is thrown out of the Synagogue. He is no longer part of the worshipping community because he would not denounce the man who healed him, because he would not denounce Jesus.

Jesus then finds the man and reveals who he is to him. It is at **that point** that the man who had been born blind confesses his belief in Jesus.

If you read through the whole story, it is hard not to find some irony. Not counting Jesus, the only person who *sees* in this story is the man who had been born blind.

I recently read an article that was written on March 14, 2020 – at the beginning of the Pandemic. In talking to Pastors about preparations for ministry in a time of COVID, Matt

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Skinner, the author of the article, notes that no one (at that point in time) knew what truly was ahead of us.

Professor Skinner noted

Christian faith is of course well suited to bear witness to “the works of God” in dismal circumstances. And those “works” aren’t always about healing and happiness.

From the New Testament’s perspective, at least, the church should expect to deliver testimony in dismal circumstances. United to an incarnate and suffering God, we’re essentially engineered to do that. Plus, it can be easier for others to see the light when we all dwell among deepening shadows.²

Skinner goes on to say

Christians historically have stepped up to alleviate poverty and suffering because those are the things Jesus spoke most clearly about. To say nothing of the fact that those are the places and faces where we encounter Jesus himself.

And when we find ourselves helpless to stop the hardship or be agents of healing, we simply bear witness. Like the man in John 9, we just refuse to

² <https://www.workingpreacher.org/dear-working-preacher/coronavirus-john-9-and-what-the-church-is-doing-here-anyway>.

stop embodying confidently what we believe to be true.³

The man born blind was called to give witness to the healing he received from Jesus. Even though that witness was rejected, he persevered and would not deny Jesus. That perseverance led to him being excluded from his community of faith.

Perseverance led to him being excluded from his community of faith.

We are a church, both local and global, that has often and continues to find itself at conflict with itself. That is the nature of human organizations – even the one established by and for Jesus Christ. We disagree. We think differently about issues of the day. We can read the same verses from Scripture and get completely different things from them.

There is irony in this story in that only the man who had been born blind truly saw. The disciples didn't see, the religious leaders and community didn't see, even the man's parents could not see. What could they not see? The truth of Jesus Christ.

³ <https://www.workingpreacher.org/dear-working-preacher/coronavirus-john-9-and-what-the-church-is-doing-here-anyway>.

We are not so unlike these others in the story. We can get so caught up in what we believe to be true that we miss the very Son of God in our midst.

Including chapter 10 as part of this larger story, we see that this passage is not just about seeing, it is also about hearing.

Professor Karoline Lewis says,

In the discourse Jesus integrates seeing and hearing with believing. Jesus reiterates that those who know him, his sheep, hear his voice and follow him. In the Gospel of John, such “knowing” articulates relationship.⁴

Following Jesus is not just about seeing. Following Jesus is about hearing – listening to his voice and trying to imitate his actions. Following Jesus is about our *relationship* with Jesus.

The world will not and in fact *should not* take the church seriously if we do not live the way of Christ. Borrowing words from Gandhi, “I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.”⁵

When you look around our community, our country – do the people who claim to be Christians reflect the life and teachings of Christ?

Do we?

⁴ Bartlett, David L.; Taylor, Barbara Brown; Long, Kimberly Bracken. Feasting on the Word Lenten Companion (p. 71). Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. Kindle Edition.

⁵ <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/22155-i-like-your-christ-i-do-not-like-your-christians>.

This is not an easy question.

I have found myself disgusted over these past 12 months with the un-Christlike words and actions of people I know claim faith in Jesus. I get angry and self-righteous.

Then I realize I am guilty of these same un-Christlike words and actions.

It is this vicious cycle that keeps others from seeing and hearing the Jesus Christ we proclaim.

We are never going to agree 100% on everything in the church and in our world. We aren't designed that way.

We can, however, decide to be faithful to following Jesus Christ, with God's help.

Professor Lewis explains this in more detail,

Jesus provides for the man born blind much more than sight. He provides for him what he, as the good shepherd, gives all of his sheep: the protection of his fold (10:16; cf. also 21:15–19), the blessing of needed pasture (10:9), and the gift of abundant life (10:10). As a result, hearing and seeing are much more than ways by which one recognizes or believes in Jesus. They are, in fact, expressions of relationship with Jesus, and relationship with Jesus means also relationship with the Father (10:14–15).⁶

⁶ Bartlett, David L.; Taylor, Barbara Brown; Long, Kimberly Bracken. Feasting on the Word Lenten Companion (p. 71). Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. Kindle Edition.

Our relationship with God must inform and shape our relationship with others in this world.

Jesus made meeting the needs of others a priority in his life and ministry. Jesus was not only concerned with the physical needs of people, although Scripture tells us he regularly met those needs, but Jesus was more concerned about the deep, inside, spiritual needs of the people he encountered.

Jesus healed the man in today's text from his blindness. Then Jesus healed the man from the blindness of others.

While I will not likely ever make a paste of mud and apply it to a blind person's eyes, I can, however, point people to Jesus, the one who can make the blind see. Jesus can bring healing in ways I can only dream.

Jesus may or may not restore someone's physical sight. Jesus can and does restore people's ability to see themselves and others in new ways.

The story for today is about before and after. The man could not explain the "how" of his healing to anyone's satisfaction. All, however, could see the before and the after – even if they rejected the very facts before them.

In the end, we must confess Jesus Christ.

Put aside the conflicts that divide us. Put aside the fear that keeps people silent.

Live your life in the manner of Christ.

See and hear.

Confess Jesus Christ.

I would like to end this sermon with a little more from the article written a year ago by Matt Skinner. Reflect on his words and ask yourself where you find yourself today.

.... when the pandemic dust has settled, the traumas will remain. The virus will have claimed the somatically vulnerable. Economic fallout will certainly punish the financially vulnerable for a long time.

...

When all is said and done, this crisis might assist in eradicating poisonous theologies about prosperity and success. Or it could make them multiply.

We might have a chance to knock down our bigoted theologies of American (or Western) exceptionalism, too. Or we could see them reinforced.

All of that remains to be seen. All I know is, we will need preachers who can help us see, in any season, where the works of God are being made manifest. That starts now, as we devise new and creative ways to demonstrate love and compassion in public, alongside the old ways.

You were called for this: to bear witness to our experience of the works of God in times like these. Please don't stop. And thank you for doing so, especially now.⁷

May this be our prayer this day and every day,

You were called for this: to bear witness to our experience of the works of God in times like these. Please don't stop. And thank you for doing so, especially now.⁸

Amen.

⁷ <https://www.workingpreacher.org/dear-working-preacher/coronavirus-john-9-and-what-the-church-is-doing-here-anyway>.

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