

BLIND TO GOD'S PRESENCE?



Scripture:

Psalm 23

¹The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. ²He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; ³he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

⁴Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me.

⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. ⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.

John 9:1-41

¹As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. ²His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” ³Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. ⁴We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” ⁶When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, ⁷saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. ⁸The 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?” ⁹Some were saying, “It is he.” Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.” ¹⁰But they kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” ¹¹He 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.”

¹²They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”

¹³They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵Then 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.” ¹⁶Some 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. ¹⁷So 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.”

¹⁸The 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 ¹⁹and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” ²⁰His parents answered, “We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; ²¹but 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.” ²²His 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.”

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

³⁵Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” ³⁶He answered, “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.” ³⁷Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.” ³⁸He said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped him. ³⁹Jesus 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.” ⁴⁰Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not blind, are we?” ⁴¹Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



BLIND TO GOD’S PRESENCE?

This long narrative in John 9 of “the blind man being healed” is one of the more complex healing stories. This healing happened about two weeks before Jesus led the festival parade we commemorate on Palm Sunday. The arrest of Jesus happens soon after this. At this point in his three year ministry, every moment could be his final teaching moment for the disciples and for all who are observing his every move.

In this one event of healing, Jesus deeply challenges the Jewish authorities and their belief that all infirmities (like blindness) are caused by our sin or the sins of our family. This ancient belief also influenced their understanding of those in poverty: that somehow the poor deserved to be in poverty.

Sadly many in our society today still have that belief, that people deserve what they suffer whether it is disabilities or poverty. And that belief excuses people from feeling guilty for not helping those in need.

That is the underlying excuse these Jewish leaders used for not celebrating the healing of the blind man.

VALUE THE INDIVIDUAL

Jesus always taught the powerful leaders of that time and still challenges us today to value the individual in need by reaching out to them no matter what the current societal beliefs and laws may dictate.

Jesus broke the sabbath law that day because following the law would have prioritized legality over humanity. Jesus chose to heal rather than neglect a person in need.

This “healing the man born blind” story also emphasizes the healing presence of Christ in its happy ending. But in the middle, it humorously points out how hypocritical the religious leaders were behaving at that time.

THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS

I emphasize “the religious leaders of that time,” because, of course, religious leaders in our time would never be so self-centered and hypocritical, now would we? Never! Well, maybe a few. It is sad, but some religious leaders even today seek power and control, especially

when status and money are also involved. That's one of the reasons I admire the Presbyterian Church USA. We have many checks and balances against abuse of the church funds.

Paula White has the title of personal minister to the President and she serves as the chair of his Evangelical Advisory Board. What is ironic is she started out by founding a non-denominational ministry with her then husband in 1991 called "Without Walls International."

It grew into a mega-church in Florida with a TV ministry that collected hundreds of thousands of dollars. But the couple split up in 2007 at the beginning of a congressional investigation initiated by Iowa Republican Senator Charles Grassley because Paula (and her now ex-husband) misused church funds to purchase million dollar homes across the country (including a condo costing them three point five million dollars in Trump Tower). Hence one of the reasons she was chosen to give the invocation at the inauguration.

(http://www.inplainsite.org/html/televangelist_lifestyles.html#Tele-White)

JESUS CHALLENGED THE GREEDY PHARISEES

Jesus challenged the greedy Pharisees in his day and he calls us to challenge religious leaders today.

I hope you would be brave enough to challenge me if I start preaching that I can guarantee you will go to heaven if you just think positive and help raise my salary. That basically is the prosperity gospel that White preaches.

Rather than open their eyes and ears to Jesus and listen to his message of love and redemption the religious leaders in our story today blindly searched for ways to discredit Jesus.

Don't we do the same? It's too easy to judge others. Don't we also cling to our comfortable lives and the status that comes with it when something or someone threatens to change our ways?

Jesus begins this story by referring to himself as the Light of the World who took this opportunity to show once again God's good works through healing this man who was born blind.

Instead of the Pharisees opening their eyes to the Light and rejoicing over the healing of the blind man, they focused on sin and disrespected the one who was healed and his parents, and ultimately they disrespected the healer himself.

But instead of cowering away, the man who was once blind and a beggar challenged them and tried to teach them!

He asked the Pharisees if they wanted to be a disciple of Christ, too. (I think he might have said it in a sarcastic way), but then he adds, very seriously, that of course Jesus is from God because otherwise he would not have been able to heal him from his blindness. They were astounded. There was no denying what he said.

But these were powerful men and they could not handle being wrong or challenged. So they threw the healed man with his new vision out of the temple rather than realize they had witnessed a miracle. The blind man received sight and those who thought they had superior sight showed they were really blind after all.

THE LOVING CHARACTER OF GOD

Nevertheless, Jesus uses this healing moment to demonstrate the loving character of God. Not only does he heal the man physically but he also heals him psychologically by being present and relational.

When the healed man was thrown out of the temple by the Pharisees, that meant he no longer had a place to worship God along with his Jewish community. So Jesus returned to him and offered his greatest gift, the gift of his presence so the man would not be alone without a worshipping community.

The healed man who could now see was healed because he allowed Jesus to touch him and because he valued Christ's presence. The proud Pharisees missed out on the relationship they could have had with Jesus.

WHAT BLINDS YOU?

Does pride ever get in the way of you making room for the presence of Jesus in your

life? Does disappointment in your life block your ability to see the light of God's presence? Our light of the world wants to brighten our darkness but we have to choose to see. We must take off our blinders of prejudice, selfishness, mistrust, resistance to change, and busyness to be in touch with Christ's presence.

I encourage you to ponder what blinds you or comes in the way of you developing a closer relationship with our Lord and Savior. What keeps you from trusting and sensing the presence of God in your life? Maybe we need to give more time to prayer and practicing the presence of God daily and learning more about other faiths in comparison to ours.

Last week we talked about the way God is present in your breath, and how the spirit flows in you and between you and others.

HOW IS GOD IN YOUR VISION?

Today I invite you to ponder how God is in your vision. How does what you see or what you are not willing to see affect your faith in God.

God wants you to see the world through his eyes. She wants you to envision how every part of God's wonderful creation is meant to sparkle and bloom and give light to the world. You included.

But the struggles we face in this life can bring a darkness and a blindness to God's presence in ourselves and in one another. Sometimes we don't want to see or feel the presence of God because we are angry with God.

We have a clip from the new movie: *The Shack* where the God character played by Octavia Spencer is explaining how pain can make us lose sight of the way God is present and always with us, even in our suffering.

<https://youtu.be/Hqhc32vs3KI>

**When all you see is your pain
you lose sight of God.**

In your bulletin you were given a piece of cloth. Please take it and use a few minutes now to make an image or write a word on the cloth. Maybe it will represent something about being open to God's presence in the darkness. You can work on this in Bowen Hall after the service and leave it and the sharpie marker in the basket in Campbell Court when you are finished or give it to Nita Pinney.

The quilters will use these squares to make a Lenten season quilted banner for us to display on our wall. Be as creative and simple as you like. We want you to participate in creating our Lenten banner. Take a few minutes and create on your square a word or image that represents God's inspirational presence in and around you this Lenten Season. Thank you.

Benediction:

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever more. Amen



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