

# TRUE LIGHT

John 9:1-41

Fourth Sunday in Lent (Series A)

March 19, 2023

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

Ny Stavanger Free Lutheran Church, Buxton, ND

The gospel lesson comes from *The Gospel According to John*, chapter 9, verses 1 through 41. I'll warn you that it's a long reading, so you may stand as you are able for the Gospel. From John 9, beginning at verse 1, we read in Jesus' name.

<sup>1</sup> As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. <sup>2</sup> And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" <sup>3</sup> Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. <sup>4</sup> We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. <sup>5</sup> As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

<sup>6</sup> Having said these things, he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud <sup>7</sup> and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.

<sup>8</sup> The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar were saying, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" <sup>9</sup> Some said, "It is he." Others said, "No, but he is like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." <sup>10</sup> So they said to him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" <sup>11</sup> He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' So I went and washed and received my sight."

<sup>12</sup> They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

<sup>13</sup> They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. <sup>14</sup> Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. <sup>15</sup> So the Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, "He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see." <sup>16</sup> Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" And there was a division among them. <sup>17</sup> So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet."

<sup>18</sup> 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 <sup>19</sup> and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" <sup>20</sup> His parents answered, "We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. <sup>21</sup> But how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." <sup>22</sup> (His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.) <sup>23</sup> Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

<sup>24</sup> So for the second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him, "Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner." <sup>25</sup> He answered, "Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." <sup>26</sup> They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" <sup>27</sup> He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do

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you also want to become his disciples?”<sup>28</sup> And they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses.<sup>29</sup> We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.”<sup>30</sup> The man answered, “Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes.<sup>31</sup> We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him.<sup>32</sup> Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind.<sup>33</sup> If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”<sup>34</sup> They answered him, “You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?” And they cast him out.

<sup>35</sup> Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, “**Do you believe in the Son of Man?**”<sup>36</sup> He answered, “And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?”<sup>37</sup> Jesus said to him, “**You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.**”<sup>38</sup> He said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him.<sup>39</sup> Jesus said, “**For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.**”<sup>40</sup> Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, “Are we also blind?”<sup>41</sup> Jesus said to them, “**If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains.**”

*Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.*

You may be seated.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

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Do you ever wonder, “Why me?” or, “What did I do to deserve this?” Something happens that just doesn’t seem fair. Maybe your car keeps breaking down, or you have one health problem after another, or they might even overlap. It could be something else. It could be all sorts of little things. You feel like everything is just going wrong. Maybe it’s not even things that happen directly to you, but all the people who are close to you are suffering, and you think you’re the link between them all.

There’s something inherited in us that, even if we know better, links cause and effect. It comes from our natural belief in a god, not the true God, and not true faith in him, but just a general belief in a god. If there is a god, then there must be a cause and effect relationship between everything. If I do something bad, then I should expect some negative consequence from it.

Theologians call this “The Opinion of the Law.” We have a naturally feeling that God reigns in this world only through the Law. If I do something bad, then I should expect a negative consequence, and if I do something good, I should expect a positive result.

We run this equation backward sometimes too. We look at the bad things that already have happened and say, “What did I do to deserve this?” Or something good might happen, and we say, “I must have done something right.”

One of the mistakes we make when we think this way is that we don’t even think rightly about the Law or ourselves. We think that we are in a more or less neutral relationship with the Law, like we have some good and some bad, so we expect that we should have some good results in our lives and some negative results, and if we’re better than average, we should receive more good results. So when we are better than we normally are, or we’re better than our neighbors next to us, but the results are bad, we cry, “Foul!” We think we deserve better. Now, if it goes the other way, if we are worse than we normally are, or we’re worse than our neighbors next to us, and nothing really bad happens, we don’t complain about that. We think we just got

away with it, and we go on. But we're not in a neutral relationship with the Law. The Law condemns us all. We deserve nothing good from God.

The bigger mistake is that we think wrongly about God. We might think of him as a grand cosmic police officer, judge, jury, and executioner, as if his work is only to punish wrong and reward good. Now, God is certainly concerned with righteousness, but his role in all this is not simply to judge between right and wrong. He's much more constructive. His great role is really to make things right. So even when we are wrong, even when we deserve nothing from him but punishment, his will is not to punish; his will is to forgive us and make things right. That is his work, and that is what we see in Jesus.

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The opinion of the Law is out in full force in this Gospel lesson, but the light of Jesus is infinitely stronger.

Everyone looked at this blind man and thought there must have been some terrible sin. The disciples looked at him and were confused. The man was born blind, so the sin must have occurred before he was born. But who sinned? Did the blind man sin? That seems hard to believe. He wasn't even born yet. How could he do something of such magnitude from the womb? So that hardly seems possible. So maybe it was his parents. But that hardly seems fair. If they did something terrible, God should punish them, not their son. This case doesn't really fit with the opinion of the Law, and the disciples are confused.

Later on, the Pharisees don't even sweat the contradiction. They simply dismiss him by saying, "You were born in utter sin" (9:34). They don't care who sinned. They just look at his blindness, even though he's not blind anymore, and determine that he's not worth the time of day.

But sometimes things are not what they seem. Sometimes those who appear to have sight are really blind, while those who appear to be blind can really see. And sometimes those who seem to be righteous are really sinful, while those who look so sinful are really righteous. Even Jesus seems sinful, at least to the Pharisees, but they turn out to be the blind ones. Sometimes things are not what they seem.

So Jesus corrects his disciples by saying, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him" (9:3).

Very rarely in life do we know exactly why something happens. When it comes to why God allows certain things to happen, why some tragedy happened to you and not someone else, we just don't know. And to try to figure it out is to attempt to pry into the secret mind of God. We just can't do it. Instead of looking for God in hidden places, we should look for him where he has revealed himself. We should seek him in his Word, and we should especially look at how God has revealed himself in the person and work of Jesus. But just this one time, Jesus gives us a glimpse into this man's tragedy. The reason is, "That the works of God might be displayed in him."

So Jesus performs the work of God on this man. And in this case, the work of God is to spit on the ground, make some mud, smear it on the blind man's eyes, and tell him to go wash it off (9:6-7). Now, if this doesn't work, that's a really mean thing to do. We should not always follow the "What Would Jesus Do?" ethic, because sometimes the answer is to make spit-mud and smear it on someone's face. In most cases, that would be considered rude. But for Jesus this sort of behavior is okay, because he's God. If he can create man out of dust, then he can also spit on the dust and use the mud to fix someone's eyes. So that's what he does. Then he instructs the blind man to go and wash in the pool of Siloam.

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And it works! The guy comes back seeing (9:7)! His neighbors could hardly believe it. Some did believe it, but others insisted it couldn't actually be the same guy (9:9). Never in the history of the world had something like this been done (9:32).

So they take the man to see the Pharisees (9:13). Maybe they can sort this out. The Pharisees interview the man, but something doesn't make sense. This healing apparently happened on the Sabbath day, when no work was allowed. Now, they know the only way a person could perform such a miracle is if he were sent from God. But anyone sent from God would also respect the Sabbath laws (9:16). It doesn't add up to them.

Jesus, by the way, was not breaking the Sabbath. But these Pharisees, who thought they were experts in the Law, were completely missing the point of the Sabbath. On the Sabbath day, we rest so that God can do his work in us. For us, that usually means that we stop to hear his Word, and God works on us with that Word. For the blind man, it meant that Jesus restored his sight. Jesus granted him relief from his disability. If that's not restful, I don't know what is. This whole thing is very much in keeping with the Sabbath. But the Pharisees don't see it, because they refuse to believe in Jesus. So they assume the formerly blind man must be an imposter.

They don't believe him until they also interview his parents, who confirm that, yes, he was blind from birth (9:18-20). Beyond that, the parents aren't willing to comment on how he received his sight. The Jews had already threatened to excommunicate anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Christ (9:22), so the parents are afraid.

But the formerly blind man is more than willing to stand up for Jesus. He had begun to see a glimpse of the Light of the World, and he was eager to testify of that Light (9:25-33). So here's this guy who just hours earlier had been a blind beggar. For most of his life, people paid very little attention to him. He wouldn't have received much education in those days. But he goes toe-to-toe in a theological debate against these well-educated leaders in Judaism. He's outnumbered and overmatched, but he absolutely schools them, and for one simple reason: he has the truth on his side. He doesn't know everything about Jesus yet, but he knows what he knows, and that is more than enough, at least for now.

He embarrasses the Pharisees, and they don't like it, so they excommunicate him from the synagogue (9:34). But that doesn't matter. They have the synagogue, but he has Jesus.

So when Jesus hears about this, he finds the man again and asks him if he believes in the Son of Man (9:35). That's a term for the Messiah (Dan. 7:13), and Jesus often uses it to refer to himself.

Now, the man doesn't quite know yet who exactly Jesus is. But he knows he is at least a prophet (9:17), so he is willing to accept whatever Jesus says. And then Jesus says to this man who had just been blind, **"You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you"** (9:37).

"[The man] said, 'Lord, I believe,' and he worshipped him" (9:38).

Jesus had mercy on this man, and in one day everything changed for him. He was a blind beggar, whom people wrote off as being a condemned sinner. But Jesus rubbed some spit-mud on his face and spoke some words to him, and now he has eyes to see the wonder of God's creation for the first time and faith to see Jesus as his God and Savior. Think about this: he had never seen anything in his entire life, and now he is looking at God, eyeball-to-eyeball.

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It was a wonderful miracle and a marvelous gift to the formerly blind man. It shows Jesus' compassion for this man as well as for all who suffer from physical disabilities. But it also has a spiritual significance, and Jesus tells us what that is.

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Jesus uses this miracle as sign of the purpose for which he came into the world: “**That those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind**” (9:39).

He was speaking in spiritual terms, and the Pharisees overheard and understood what he meant. So they asked, “Are we also blind?” (9:40).

And Jesus basically says, *Yes*.

He says to them, “**If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains**” (9:41). It is because they insist on their own righteousness that they are condemned as sinners.

So it turns out that nothing is as it seems. The righteous Pharisees who are just trying to do the right thing turn out to be blind sinners. The formerly blind man who must have been born in utter sin is not blind anymore and is a worshipper of the One True God, whom he now sees with his own eyes. And the Sabbath-breaker who smears spit-mud on people’s faces is not actually a sinner. He is, in fact, a prophet, and more than a prophet. He is the Christ. He is the Light of the World. He is the One True God in human flesh. The religious leaders condemn him as a sinner, but he is the exact opposite in every way. Things are not what they seem. And this is how it usually goes with Jesus.

For on that dark Good Friday as the sun’s light failed in the middle of the day, the Light of the World shone forth as never before. On that guilty Good Friday as a so-called insurrectionist, blasphemer, and Sabbath-breaker was condemned as a vile sinner, the righteousness of God was manifested. And on that deadly Good Friday as blood, and breath, and life itself fled from the body of God, life and light and grace and peace burst forth upon a dying world.

On that dark Good Friday, things were certainly not what they seemed.

So now, “people dwelling in darkness, upon them light has shone” (Is. 9:2). For things are not always what they seem.

And, finally, you, dear sinner, are not what you seem. For on you the Light of the World has dawned, and your Father in heaven finds you to be something quite different. He finds you to not be a sinner. But he finds you to possess the righteousness of Jesus Christ. You no longer belong to the darkness; you are children of light (Eph. 5:8). Amen.

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Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.