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The Georgetown Presbyterian Church  
March 26, 2017  
Fourth Sunday in Lent

One Thing I Know  
John 9:1-12, 35-38

As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” 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, saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. 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?” Some were saying, “It is he.” Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.” But they kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” 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.” They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”

Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” He answered, “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.” Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.” He said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped him.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Let us pray. Dear God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight. O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

“Rabbi, who sinned that this man was born blind?”

The disciples, ever eager to know more about God’s world, use their encounter with a blind man to ask Jesus a question. They want to learn the reason!

They’ve been called as disciples. He’s asked them to “come and see.” They know that something is afoot with Jesus, that he is the man with the plan. But just what exactly that plan is . . . they’re not so sure.

So they ask: *Rabbi, who sinned? Explain this to us. Who’s to blame? Explain this suffering so we can understand it.*

The question betrays the disciple’s assumption that some sin must have taken place for the man to be in this condition. He is an object of pity, an object of debate, an . . . object. The sin—whether his or another’s—has tainted him, rendered him void. Not fully human. The disciple’s question does not afford hope for this man.

This man was suffering. He was an outcast. The disciples, perhaps moved by pity, wanted to know *the reason*.

Jesus's answer seems far from satisfying. "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him."

Oh. Okay . . . No, wait, what?

This man was born blind so that a little trick could be done here to show God's power? That can't be right. That's replacing two bad options with an even worse one.

It is not easy to see what Jesus means here, so we need to lean in and take a closer look.

The chapter is a literary wonder, which takes a man from physical blindness to spiritual sight, and which takes the social and religious establishment from physical sightedness to spiritual blindness.

In the first place, the poor man is defined entirely by his blindness. He is not spoken to, he does not speak. Then, Jesus rubs spit-dirt in his eyes and tells him to "Get out."

The miracle—or the "sign" to use the parlance of John's gospel—takes place somewhere in the washing, but again no one asks the blind man, and Jesus and his disciples move on from the scene.

Good news for this man? Not so much. The poor man, returning to his community is met with confusion and suspicion. Some of his neighbors refuse to recognize him and question his credentials. "How were your eyes opened?" They demanded." He replies: "The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. Then I washed. Then I could see." Not exactly a stirring confession of faith in the Lord.

"Where is this man?" his neighbors demand again. "*I do not know.*"

The blind man can see! But his community does not meet him with rejoicing. To them it doesn't make sense. There is no good reason for this transformation. So they take him to the religious meaning-makers: the Pharisees in the synagogue.

The Pharisees ask him the same questions: what happened? He repeats his story . . . again, no rejoicing. No back-slapping. No one asks this guy his new favorite color.

Instead there is again some discussion and debate. Only now: a little movement. John writes "Finally they turned again to the blind man, 'What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened.' The man replied, 'he is a prophet.'"

The story is not over, but in a few verses, this man has gone from being a beggar at the gate to a man who offers his opinions at the heart of a religious debate. Also, his description of Jesus has changed from "a man" to "a prophet." Others though, have gone from calling Jesus "a man" to calling him "a sinner." He has healed on the Sabbath! They say.

The plot thickens. The man's *parents* are brought in, and are interrogated about these events. Likely they have been co-sufferers with their son. His blindness would have been a sign of their failure as a family. What's more, they know that the Pharisees have been excluding people who are followers of Jesus, and they risk further ostracism if they are associated with him. Because of all this, they are afraid and refuse to answer. Instead they say "Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself."

For so long he was powerless, voiceless, constrained to the margins. But now in a round-about way, the man from the margins is summoned to speak on the heart of the matter.

The Pharisees still try to control him, asking him to denounce Jesus for healing on the Sabbath. “Give glory to God! We know this man Jesus is a sinner!” They say.

“I don’t know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.”

He repeats his testimony, sticking to the facts. But the circumstances have changed. Instead of being asked “what happened?” He is being asked to denounce Jesus. The stakes have been raised. “I do not know” he says again of Jesus. But he does not stop there. “One thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see.”

The Pharisees, enraged, claim that they have authority from Moses, who is from God, but “as for this man, *we do not know where he comes from.*” They cannot seem to make meaning out of what is before their eyes.

“Here is an astonishing thing!” the man answers. You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes! *We know* that God does not listen to sinners . . . If this man were not from God he could do nothing.”

The blind man, who had no voice, who had no place, who was assumed to be “in sin,” has had an encounter with Jesus. His encounter leaves him with his sight, leaves him with the voice of a prophet, leaves him in the heart of the synagogue, proclaiming the glory of God. God’s glory is revealed and the gospel is proclaimed! Amen and amen and Amen! (I’d toss in a hallelujah, but we’re in Lent, so I’ll restrain myself.)

“You were born entirely in sins and yet you are trying to teach *us*?” This was too much for the Pharisees, and they drove him out.

At the end of the story, Jesus encounters the man again as an outcast. Are we back where we started? Yes and no. Jesus is here, but the disciples gone and are replaced by the man born blind. There is a question, but instead of the disciples asking “Rabbi, who sinned?” Jesus asks, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”

Now it is not the disciples asking, but Jesus. The man’s response is another question: “Who is he, sir? Tell me, so I may believe in him.”

Gone are the assumptions of closed systems of sin and suffering, of blame and reason. In their place, the singular question of John’s gospel: Do you believe in the son of man?

The man knows what Jesus can do. He knows that he was blind but now he can see. His neighbors and family are confused and fearful, the Pharisees tell him that Jesus is a sinner, but he trusts his own eyes, and replies to Jesus in hope. “Who is he sir? Tell me so I may believe!” Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and the one speaking to you is he.” “Lord I believe!”

In that moment the transformation is complete. This man is now Jesus’s disciple. He has seen the light of the world and believed.

**Rabbi, who sinned? The disciples looked at this person and could only see his blindness. Jesus looked at him and saw God's work—God's image. Jesus . . . saw him.**

*This* is the Amen moment. Jesus's work with this man did not begin and end with his blindness. Jesus's work with this man began long ago with him being created in God's image. Jesus's work with dirt brought the man born blind to full personhood, just as God formed the first humans from the mud of the new creation.

“Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day...”

Amidst the cold calculations of sin and blame, Jesus breaks in and let's something grow. He planted the seed of faith and gives the man light, earth, and time.

Faith for this man grew from “I don't know” to “One thing I know” to “Lord, I believe!” Between his first and last encounter with Jesus, the man could only point to his experience. He couldn't let go of “that one thing” or it wouldn't let go of him.

Trouble came after his encounter with Jesus. Conflict and difficulty. More often than not it seemed as if this “one thing” dragged him along, and as he pursued it, or as it pursued him, he grew towards true insight. Even when no one around him could see what was happening, he came to truly see God.

The story of this man is not only his, but is ours also. We have been born blind, in a world that does not see. But God wants something different, God wants us to open our eyes, to be truly human, to live a life glorifying God. God wants us to have faith. This faith is not a cheap trick, but is the gift of personhood. Only when we give up our spiritual blindness, and abandon our preconceived notions of who we are, who God is, and who we're meant to be, can we truly become the people God wants us to be. This is nothing short of a miracle.

The man's declaration of faith is just as miraculous as his restored sight. Both are signs of God's light breaking into the world's darkness. Both are signs of hope. We are gathered here today because we have felt God's hopeful presence in our lives.

Like the man, we may not always fully see God's purpose, but like the man, we cling to the “one thing we know”:

That in Jesus Christ, God has touched us.

That “one thing” gives us the strength to face difficulty, to stand strong, and to finally declare: Lord, I believe.

We are gathered here in worship of the light of the world. And by that light, there is work to be done.

Amen.