

All Are Blind – John 9:1-7, 13-17, 34-39

Pastor Colin Rieke – March 19, 2017

¹ As he went 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 “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. ⁴ As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵ While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” ⁶ Having said this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes. ⁷ “Go,” he told him, “wash in the Pool of Siloam” (this word means Sent). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing. ¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. ¹⁴ Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man’s eyes was a Sabbath. ¹⁵ Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. “He put mud on my eyes,” the man replied, “and I washed, and now I see.” ¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.” But others asked, “How can a sinner do such miraculous signs?” So they were divided. ¹⁷ 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.” ³⁴ To this they replied, “You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!” And they threw him out. ³⁵ Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” ³⁶ “Who is he, sir?” the man asked. “Tell me so that I may believe in him.” ³⁷ Jesus said, “You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.” ³⁸ Then the man said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him. ³⁹ Jesus said, “For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.”

This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

One of the contributions the ancient Greeks are famous for, besides the Olympic Games, is the contributions to the area of Philosophy – the study of the meaning of life. There were some great philosophers that came from Greece. One of the great philosophers was a man by the name of Plato. One of the ways he described life was with his *Allegory of the Cave*, perhaps you’ve heard of it before. In this allegory, there’s a man who all his life has been chained to the wall of a cave, only being able to see the opposite wall. On that opposite wall are shadows dancing, shining from the light of an unseen fire behind the man. This is all he knows, this is his whole reality. Then, as the allegory goes on, the man’s chains are loosened, and he’s allowed to look back on the figures creating the shadows, he is allowed to crawl out to the mouth of the cave and see for the very first time sun, plants and animals. All of this is new to him, his reality is expanding rapidly as he discovers reality is more than just those shadows dancing on the wall.

Then, like any excited person he goes back into the cave to tell his fellow prisoners about this whole new world they’ve been missing. But he’s laughed at as being crazy, because he doesn’t think the shadows on the wall are real. Now, there’s a few more details to the story than that, but suffice to say,

that's the main outline. And it's an outline that fits surprisingly close to the gospel reading we heard about moments ago, with one noticeable difference. Instead of the prisoner being chained in a cave, imagine the prisoner being blind in the cave. And instead of the prisoner's chains being loosened, his eyes were opened.

It's in this revised allegory of the cave that describes the message behind this account we heard in the gospel, an account in which Jesus heals a man who was born blind. But this account really isn't about the physical blindness that affects only a small portion of the population, but it's more about the spiritual blindness that affects all the world's population. It's about the spiritual blindness, and the reaction we have to it. Because the plain and simple truth that the Bible makes clear, the plain and simple truth that God makes clear, is that we ALL ARE BLIND.

Now, at the risk of some people falling asleep, I'd like you to participate in an experiment with me. I would like all of you to close your eyes. Close your eyes for about a minute until I tell you to open them again. Now that your eyes are closed, you get a small and short idea of what it might have been like for the man who was born blind from our gospel for this morning. And now, keeping your eyes closed, imagine you had been led to the gates of the temple in Jerusalem, and had been placed there, begging for coins, begging for bread from the passersby. You can't see anyone, you can't see anything, but you can hear the sound of people walking by, some placing coins in your bowl laying at your feet. Now imagine if that is what you did all day, every day. OK, you can open your eyes again.

How did that experiment go? While it may have been nice to rest your eyes for just a minute, I don't know how many of us would be able to picture what it would have been like for that blind man to do that every day, every day from the beginning of his life. He had never been able to see. Just like there are people today that are blind, they're not able to see. Some are blind as a result of age, others as a result of a disease or a stroke, still others from some birth defect. But just imagine what it would be like to be blind, totally blind. For many of us, it's hard to imagine. And even though many of us have the ability to see with our physical eyes that we have been given, we suffer from a blindness far worse than that. It's something that many don't even realize they have. It's a spiritual blindness. A spiritual blindness caused by sin. And all people suffer from this blindness.

If physical blindness is because the physical eyes don't see what's in front of them, then spiritual blindness is a result of your spiritual eyes not being able to see. Another way to put this might be not seeing or understanding the bigger picture. It's very easy to see how this works. Whether we would be Christian or not, there's something inside of us called a conscience – it tells us, or at least it's supposed to tell us what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is bad. And so there are some things that are pretty easy to tell what is right and what is wrong. Murder and stealing are wrong, while not murdering and not stealing are right. I would be surprised at anyone who would disagree with that point. But then there are those areas of life where our moral compass is not so clear. We may all agree that adultery is wrong, but when it comes to sleeping with someone not your spouse, you will have some disagreement. Many would think that looking out for yourself at all costs and at the expense of others is fine, while others would disagree. But instead of coming to the conclusion that our moral compass is

broken, we instead come to the conclusion that anyone can decide what is right for them, anyone can decide what truth is.

But see how that worked out in our gospel for this morning. We need only to look at the reaction of the Pharisees to the miracle. **“They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man’s eyes was a Sabbath...Some of the Pharisees said, ‘This man is not from God for he does not keep the Sabbath.’”** We see how the Pharisees were so lost in their own little world. They were predetermined to oppose Jesus, and so anything that he did would have been seen as bad, as evil. And according to their own laws regarding what constituted work on the Sabbath, Jesus was guilty, he made mud. And yet, they were so blind they couldn’t see it. And they were divided.

They were so predisposed to discrediting Jesus, they didn’t even see the miracle for the wonder that it was. This was a man who was born blind, he had never seen in his life before, and Jesus restored his sight perfectly. Don’t you think that we would be ecstatic? And yet all they could think about was damage control, they didn’t want anyone acknowledging that Jesus was a prophet of God. They had asked the blind man’s parents first to make sure that he was their son, and that he was born blind, and how it is that he could see. They passed the buck and said ask the son, because they didn’t want to get excommunicated, or kicked out of the synagogue. And so then they asked the blind man himself, ‘Who do you think he is?’ **“He’s a prophet.”** And with that, they kicked him out.

Now, getting kicked out of the synagogue is the equivalent to being excommunicated from the church. In fact, in some instances, it was even worse, the person who was kicked out could not even interact with those who were still a part of the synagogue. But this blind, but now seeing man knew what it was like to see, truly see. And when Jesus found him out he asked him just that. **“Do you believe in the Son of Man?”** in other words, “Do you believe in the Messiah?” **“Who is he sir?” the man asked. ‘tell me so that I may believe in him.’ Jesus said, ‘you have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.’ Then the man said, ‘Lord I believe,’ and he worshiped him.”** Then pay attention to Jesus’ next words, **“For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.”**

It’s easy to see that our moral compasses don’t always work. But while it’s easy to see that in an account from the Bible, it’s much harder to see it in our own lives. Oftentimes we are too close to a situation to have any objectivity. We will always conclude that what we did was right, or at least justified, and what someone else did was not justified. Does that sound like a moral compass that works? Or does that sound more like loaded dice that will come up with the same result every time? We are completely lost, we are completely blind. Blind in a worse way than that blind man.

We can come up with no solution for our blindness, for even if we recognize that we are blind, we can’t un-blind ourselves. Something has to happen to us. We need to be healed from our blindness, much like the man was healed by Jesus. And the wonderful news is that just as Jesus made mud and healed that man’s eyes and he was able to see, he has done the same thing for us. He has made satisfaction for our sins by his death on the cross, and has placed that salve of the gospel upon our eyes, our sin has been washed away, and we can see.

The miracles that Jesus did while he was here on this earth, like healing this blind man, was never the purpose of why he came. The purpose of why he came was to give sight to those who are spiritually blind, and to confirm in their blindness those who think they can see. Like the man in the allegory of the cave, we have been loosened from our chains, we have been un-blinded, we have been brought to the mouth of the cave, and we have seen what real life is, we have seen what real love is, we have seen who our real God is. And we will want others to experience the love of Christ that we have. A love that we get to enjoy, a love we want to walk in, a love we want to share with other people. It's a love that we share when we invite people to join us for worship. It's a love we share when we lend a listening ear. It's a love that we share when we personally tell others what God's love did for them. Your eyes have been opened, you can see. Now go share that with everyone! Amen.