

Blindness to Sight, Sight to Blindness – John 9:1-7, 13-17, 34-39

I've had to wear glasses ever since grade school. Even though both of my parents had close to 20/20 vision until their mid-40s when they finally had to get reading glasses, my eyes have almost always needed glasses or contact lenses. In high school I used to wear contacts a lot more and quickly found out how important it is to be able to see clearly. Because one day I got something in my eye. In the process of getting it out, my contact fell on the floor. Now I don't know what your policy is about stuff that falls on the floor. But I draw the line when it's a contact lens. I don't want to put in whatever was on the floor right on my eye. And of course I didn't have an extra contact with me either. So for the rest of the day I kept my bad eye closed so I focus with my good eye on what was ahead of me. It was on that day I quickly learned how important it is to be able to see clearly even when you're only walking around a building you already know well. Because if you can't see, you're going to get yourself in trouble and hurt yourself.

It's the same idea if you want to know where you're going in a spiritual sense. You need to be able to spiritually see where you're going. In these verses from the Apostle John, we have sight and blindness being talked about both on a physical and a spiritual level. The physical level is seen with the man who was born blind. He literally couldn't see anything. But after Jesus healed him, he could see as plain as day. But there's also the spiritual level. To be spiritually blind means to be an unbeliever and still living in your sins. All throughout John's Gospel he continually equates sin with darkness and those who live in sin as being blind. But if you have spiritual sight, that's when you have faith in Jesus since you see and believe in him.

When we read these verses earlier in our service, did you expect to this work of God to show us so much? On one hand you have the man who was born blind. He starts off in physical and spiritual blindness, but ends up with physical and spiritual sight. And then you have the Pharisees who remained the same. Although they could physically see, they remain spiritually blind. What was the difference between the two?

It wasn't for lack of knowledge about Jesus. Both of them knew that Jesus was something this world had never seen before. You have the man who once was blind who entirely depended on charity to survive. But after Jesus opened his eyes for the first time, he knew that Jesus was at the very least a prophet. And after Jesus revealed himself to be the promised Son of Man, he immediately placed his trust in him and worshiped him.

But then you have the Pharisees who investigated the miracle. They knew a miracle had happened, but they couldn't agree on who Jesus was. Some realized that God is the only one who can cure a person who has been blind since birth. As a result Jesus must have something to do with God. But they still didn't have spiritual sight and in Jesus' promises. The other

Pharisees were convinced that Jesus had nothing to do with God because he had broken two of their laws about the Sabbath. The first law is that you weren't supposed to heal anyone on the Sabbath unless it was a matter of life or death. Although the man's blindness was a serious matter, wasn't a matter of life or death. So Jesus should have waited a day or two to cure the man's blindness. The second law was that on the Sabbath you weren't supposed to do any work like kneading something. That's kneading with a "k." Like when you make bread by hand, you have to knead the dough by working it with your hands. I've been told it's hard work! Although Jesus didn't make any bread, he did make mud. If you remember, after Jesus told his disciples that he is the light of the world, **"he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes"** to cure his blindness. According to these Pharisees, Jesus had kneaded the ground to make mud and in so doing broke the Sabbath. As a result, they were convinced that Jesus couldn't have anything to do with God.

And that's where we come to Jesus' chilling statement at the very end of our verses for this morning. **"For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind."** The man who once was blind now saw Jesus with spiritual sight and wouldn't receive any of this chilling judgment. But the Pharisees who physically saw Jesus but remained spiritual blind, they would receive his judgment. And what judgment is that? To remain in the same sins they were born into for the rest of the time they remained spiritually blind.

Which side of the fence do you and I fall on? With the man who once was blind but now has spiritual sight? Or with the Pharisees who see Jesus' power yet remain spiritually blind? It isn't enough to simply know about Jesus or recognize his power. We need to have faith and believe in him if we're going to have spiritual sight. As I look at my heart and as I look out on you, I see how we willingly have come this morning to hear God's Word and grow in our faith. We have confessed our sins and happily received God's forgiveness. I'd be willing to say that God would find us with the man who once was blind but now had spiritual sight. And I'm happy about that.

But what I want to focus us on this morning is an encouragement that we continue to keep our spiritual sight and keep on believing in Jesus. And the reason why is because we all know that our battle with sin isn't over yet. Whether or not people like to admit it, when we come into this world we are born into the same spiritual blindness the Pharisees show us. And our lives followed suit. As Saint Paul tells us in Ephesians chapter 2, and I'm summarizing here, we **"were dead in [our] transgressions and sins...[we] followed the ways of this world and...[the devil] who is now at work in those who are disobedient....[we were] gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts."** For such people Jesus tells us what his judgment is. Guilty. 100% percent. And since they have shown with their

lives on Earth that they want to live apart from God, so God will make that permanent where they will be sentenced to suffer eternally in hell where God is not. This is who you and I were at birth before we received our spiritual sight.

What are some ways you still battle your sinful self that wants to take your eyes off Jesus and bring you back to your spiritual blindness? Maybe it's a feeling of sinful superiority. The Pharisees were often guilty of this because they prided themselves on how well they kept all the extra laws they had made to supposedly protect God's law. We see that in action with these verses when they refuse to see Jesus for who he really is since he broke 2 of their additional Sabbath laws. Do you find yourself looking down on others and purposefully distancing yourself from them because they don't fit your criteria? Maybe it's an old sinful habit of yours that you just can't seem to shake off. No matter how much you try to get rid of it, you just can't. Not only is it impossible to stop indulging that habit, but sadly you secretly enjoy it in the moment. Maybe it's something else you struggle with. But no matter what form it takes, one thing is clear – it's our old sinful self coming back and enticing us back into the spiritual blindness we once came from. And even though we hear Jesus' strong words of judgment for such sins, we still give in to them despite knowing better.

It's for times like this that I point you back to the man who once was blind and see how Jesus brought him spiritual sight. It wasn't because the blind man had done spectacular things or happened to be in the right place at the right time. It's because Jesus sought him out of his grace and mercy. The same grace and mercy he showed in this miracle he would later show on the cross for helpless sinners like us. Because you see, there's no way we can get ourselves out of our spiritual blindness. We're entirely stuck in it with a condemned future hanging over us. But it's for people like you, me, the man who once was blind, and the Pharisees who still rejected Jesus, that he came to this world to show us his grace and mercy.

And we see that wonderful grace and mercy as Jesus makes his way to cross. How he chose to come down from heaven to be the Son of Man. How he kept God's law even when people falsely accused him otherwise. How he reached out in love to people only to be betrayed and taken out of context. How he brought spiritual sight to people like you and me even though we wanted nothing to do with him. And it's to such people he gives this spiritual sight through the gift of faith and the promise that our sins are forgiven. Even when we give in to our old sinful selves, Jesus continues to reach out to us in love and renew the forgiveness we already have. And because we have been forgiven of our sins, that chilling judgment that once hung over us has been removed. No longer is it hell that's waiting for us. It's heaven where we get to be with our God forever and won't have to battle our sins anymore since there will be no more sin.

But you know what the great thing is? We don't have to wait for years for Jesus to come by like the man who was blind. We get to keep our spiritual sight strong by going to our Lord in his Word and sacraments. Right now the Holy Spirit is working through these words from the Apostle John to strengthen our faith so we continue to have spiritual sight. As we keep coming back to church and preparing our hearts for Easter in this church season of Lent, again and again we hear how Jesus has paid the price for our sins so that we are forgiven. We get the privilege to see infants spiritually see for the first time through the sacrament of baptism. Even though they can only physically see a few inches away from their face because they're so young, their spiritual sight is made sure by their Savior. And later this morning, we get to receive Christ's body and blood together, with, and under the bread and wine to receive Jesus' forgiveness in yet another concrete way.

If you want to make your way around the spiritual world, you need to have spiritual sight. That doesn't come by knowing about Jesus. It comes by believing in him through the words of Scripture. But we will still struggle with our sinful nature that tries so hard to bring us back to our spiritual blindness we were born in. But it is then we need all the more to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus so we can continue to believe in him. I pray that the Lord help us all fight off our sinful selves by repenting of our sins aright and joyfully coming to his Word so that we may continue to have this wonderful spiritual sight. Amen.