

When Jesus Spat + Here's Mud In Your Eye!

a sermon by Pastor D. Thomas Ford, Jr.
Salem Lutheran Church
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John 9:1-41

- [1] As he passed by, he saw a man blind from his birth.
[2] And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"
[3] Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him.
[4] We must work the works of him who sent me, while it is day; night comes, when no one can work.
[5] As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."
[6] As he said this, he spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle and anointed the man's eyes with the clay,
[7] saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Silo'am" (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.
[8] The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar, said, "Is not this the man who used to sit and beg?"
[9] Some said, "It is he"; others said, "No, but he is like him." He said, "I am the man."
[10] They said to him, "Then how were your eyes opened?"
[11] He answered, "The man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to Silo'am and wash'; so I went and washed and received my sight."
[12] They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."
[13] They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind.
[14] Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes.
[15] The Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, "He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and I see."
[16] 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?" There was a division among them.
[17] So they again said to the blind man, "What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet."
[18] 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,
[19] and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?"
[20] His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind;
[21] 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."
[22] His parents said this because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if any one should confess him to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.
[23] Therefore his parents said, "He is of age, ask him."

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

to become his disciples?" [28] And they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses.
 [29] We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from."
 [30] The man answered, "Why, this is a marvel! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes.
 [31] We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if any one is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him.
 [32] Never since the world began has it been heard that any one opened the eyes of a man born blind.
 [33] If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."
 [34] They answered him, "You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?" And they cast him out.
 [35] Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, "Do you believe in the Son of man?"
 [36] He answered, "And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?"
 [37] Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and it is he who speaks to you."
 [38] He said, "Lord, I believe"; and he worshiped him.
 [39] Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind."
 [40] Some of the Pharisees near him heard this, and they said to him, "Are we also blind?"
 [41] Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains.



Grace be unto you, and peace, from God Our Father and Our Lord and Savior Jesus The Christ!

One day at a busy airport, the passengers on a commercial airliner are seated, waiting for the cockpit crew to show up so they can get under way. The pilot and copilot finally appear in the rear of the plane, and begin walking up to the cockpit through the center aisle. Both appear to be blind. The pilot is using a white cane, bumping into passengers right and left as he stumbles down the aisle, and the copilot is using a guide dog. Both have their eyes covered with huge sunglasses. At first the passengers do not react, thinking it must be some sort of practical joke.

However, after a few minutes the engines start revving and the airplane starts moving down the runway. The passengers look at each other with some uneasiness, whispering among themselves and looking desperately to the stewardesses for reassurance.

Then the airplane starts accelerating rapidly and people begin panicking. Some passengers are praying, and as the plane gets closer and closer to the end of the runway, the voices are becoming more and more hysterical. Finally, when the airplane has less than 20 feet of runway left, there is a sudden change in the pitch of the shouts as everyone screams at once, and at the very last moment the airplane lifts off and is airborne.

Up in the cockpit, the copilot breathes a sigh of relief and turns to the pilot and signs: "You know, one of these days the passengers aren't going to scream, and we're gonna get killed!"

Blind people make some people nervous. Jesus was not one of them – nervous, that is.

Jesus came upon a man blind from birth. And he spat into the dirt. And kneaded the mud. And put it on the blind man's eyes. And sent him to go and wash the mud off in the Pool of Siloam. And as the man did as he was told, Jesus healed him. And he did it on the Sabbath,

when it was illegal to knead anything, dough or mud! And all the passengers screamed at once as soon as the plane was lifting off and becoming airborne. All the “sighted” religious people and all the neighbors, everyone who had known the man all his life, were dumbfounded. Has this really happened? Who did it? How can we be sure we are safe and this plane isn’t going to crash? Blind people are supposed to stay blind! Change! Who said anything about change! This man has to be a sinner!

I have known some blind people. One was Doc Lentz, a member of my home church. Doc became blind as an adult from being over-exposed to dry-cleaning fumes. He went to school for the blind, learned Braille and successfully operated an Esso Station and country store for many years. He was 6’9” tall, always wore dark pilot’s sunglasses and walked with a long white cane with a red tip. He could tell the difference between a \$5 bill and a \$1 bill by touch and could pump gas to the tenth of a gallon by sound. Doc was in church every Sunday. He always had a kind word for me and the other children and a constant sense of humor.

Another blind person I knew was a college professor I worked for, who was also a Lutheran Pastor, Doris P. Rudisill, Ph.D., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He discovered he was going blind while he was working on his doctorate. By the time he got it, he was totally blind. He proceeded to teach religion and philosophy for the next 40 years. I worked for him as a student aide, reading to him and helping him grade papers. I did get nervous once when he asked me one Saturday afternoon to come to his house to catch a wild Tom Cat that had lodged in his basement. The cat almost scratched my eyes out when I poked at it with a long stick to try to get it to jump into a blanket I was holding beneath it. The cat instead jumped straight at my face. When I spat out a few expletives, Dr. Rudisill became nervous and insisted that we go get a bait trap from the local vet and approach the thing more strategically.

If I told you more stories about blind people I’ve known I would have to tell you about Dr. Joseph Sittler, one of the greatest Lutheran theologians of the 20th century, at whose feet I sat in Chicago. Dr. Sittler could give magnificent, soul-inspiring, heart-uplifting lectures and sermons from memory, quoting long lines from Shakespeare with no hems, haws or hesitations and with seamlessly smooth transitions from one paragraph to the next, yet, when he went to the grocery store to shop one afternoon, and I was there at a distance observing, I saw him take a high-powered pocket magnifying glass and hold it up to the package of a feminine hygiene product he was trying to choose by brand for his wife Jean, who was much younger and confined to a wheel chair. He was then in the final stages of macular degeneration, but by God, he was going to get the right brand.

Stories about blind people inspire us. Our struggles as sighted people become far less significant as we observe blind people living courageous lives. Did you see the movie, “The Scent of A Woman”, with Al Pacino? Did you see “The Miracle Worker” with Patty Duke. Both Al Pacino and Patty Duke won Oscars for their performances as blind persons.

Would you give Jesus an Oscar for his performance in today’s Gospel? He’s the only one I know who ever healed a person born blind.

And yet, today's Gospel is not an historical performance by a religious actor of yesteryear. And it's not just another inspiring story about a blind person. It is mud in your eye and my eye right now!

You see, or do you – the issue, the reality, is our blindness and the Healer who comes offering us sight! Right now!

Here's how a Maryland Church of The Brethren Pastor Peter Haynes puts it:

“I think it's a real kick that Jesus used dirt and spit to heal this man. Here the question was about dirt - you know, who sinned? Face it, this is a down-right dirty world, folks. So Jesus just took some of that dirt, mixed it with saliva and stuck it on the man's eyes. It became healing dirt! Just like God can take some of our 'dirt' and do something with it. We've all got dirt, friends. We're all sinners. The difference is what God can do with that dirt. Yes, from the dust we were made - to dust we will one day return, these mortal bodies. It's in the middle there, between 'from' and 'return,' that God is at work. Even in very 'earthy' ways. Healing happens even in unclean places and ways.

“This story is somewhat of a farce, for the blind person was not the one who once sat beside the road begging. The blind were those who just plain could not, or would not see what God was really doing. Sometimes, the mud gets in your eyes and you don't wash it away. You get used to the way things are, and you can't envision them any different. In fact, you'll fight to keep them the same way. Ask anyone who has 'gotten well,' especially after a long illness. Sometimes, 'staying well' is harder than getting there, because people around you have built their lives around what you **can't** do, instead of what you **can**.”¹

An unemployed man knocked on the door of a house in an affluent suburb. “Mister,” he said when the homeowner answered, “I'm down on my luck and need some money. But I'm not looking for a hand-out. Do you have any odd jobs I could do?”

“Well, let me see,” the man responded. “I do have a porch at the side of the house that could use a coat of paint. I'll pay you \$100 to do that.” “Great!” replied the guy. “I can paint.”

The homeowner handed over a can of white paint and a large brush, and the man went around to the side of the house. In fifteen minutes, he was back knocking on the door. “All finished,” he reported.

¹ Peter L. Haynes “Here's Mud In Your Eye” <http://rockhay.tripod.com/sermons/2002/02-03-10.htm>

”Wow, that’s amazing!” the homeowner exclaimed, handing him the promised payment. “I never saw anyone paint a porch so fast!” “Oh, it wasn’t hard,” the man said. “And by the way, it isn’t a porch--it’s a Corvette.”²

Sometimes when something seems too good to be true, we end up with surprising consequences, “seeing” far more than we had ever hoped to see.

When Jesus gives us sight – spiritual sight – and thereby takes away our “blindness from birth”, we begin a journey, like the healed blind man in today’s Gospel. The journey has surprises and risks. It involves movement and change. We move out of the old comfort zones. Often our new healed status elicits strong reactions from others. Some are emphatic with disapproval. Authority figures can get very uncomfortable. Lovers of the status quo get very nervous. Friends and colleagues can react with derision or outright dismissal.³


Now, I don’t know how Our Lord is gifting you with spiritual sight, but I can tell you that the way you can tell if you are really seeing is by using the “Jesus Eye Chart.”

Cover one eye. Look at The Cross. You should see, from his head, his hands, his feet, sorrow and love, flowing mingled down.⁴

Now, cover the other eye. Look at The Cross. You should see Love Divine, all loves excelling!⁵

Now, close both eyes for a moment. Now, open them and focus on The Cross.

Upon that cross of Jesus mine eye at times can see
The very dying form of One Who suffered there for me;
And from my stricken heart with tears two wonders I confess;
The wonders of redeeming love and my unworthiness.

Words:  Elizabeth C. Clephane, 1868

Now, let your eyes see his eyes looking down at you.

² Thanks to Louise Westfall, Cleveland Heights, Ohio for this story.
<http://www.fairmountchurch.org/worshipandmusic/theblindwhosee.htm>

³ A summary of points made by Louise Westfall.

⁴ Words by Isacc Watts, 1707.

⁵ Words by Charles Wesley, 1747.

Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind;
Sight, riches, healing of the mind,
Yea, all I need in Thee to find,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Words:  Charlotte Elliott, 1835

Yes, you have passed the test! You can see!

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found;
Was blind, but now I see.

Words:  John Newton, *Olney Hymns* (London: W. Oliver, 1779).

And because you can see, it means you look at others and the world very differently than someone who is spiritually blind. Your response, like the healed blind man, is one of worship.

The main characteristic of your new vision in Christ is that you see the poor and the troubled and the hungry and the naked and the stranger and the imprisoned and you reach out to help them

Today at 1 p.m. Glendale churches, including Salem, are having the annual CROP Walk. Monies given in support of walkers are used to combat hunger locally and around the world. I encourage you to give very generously in sponsoring one or more walkers from Salem. They will be in the narthex following worship.

You remember the Parable of The Sheep and The Goats. It was the “eye” test Jesus himself gave to his disciples just before he began his Passion. (See Matthew 25)

Those who could “see” weren’t even aware of it. Their sight in Christ was normal spiritual vision, which was so much a part of their daily lives they weren’t even aware of it. “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or naked and clothe you”

“Inasmuch as you did it unto one of the least of these, you did it to me.”

That’s the kind of worship people with normal sight in Christ offer.

Yes, Jesus spat. (pointing to The Cross) Here’s mud in your eye! We wash it out through the waters of our baptism into Christ’s death and resurrection to worship Him today and always! Amen.