### “The Sassy Blind Man” Steve Finlan for The First Church, Mar. 19, 2023

**John 9:1–34**

1 As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” 3Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. 4We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day. . . 5As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” 6When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, 7saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). He went and washed and came back able to see. 8The 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?” . . . 10They kept asking him, “How were your eyes opened?” 11He 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.”

. . . 13 They brought him to the Pharisees. 14Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. 15Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, “He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.” 16Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.” But others said, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” And they were divided. . .

24 So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said . . . “This man is a sinner.” 25He answered, “I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” 26They said to him, “What did he do to you? . . .” 27He answered them “I have told you already and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?” 28Then they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. 29We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.” 30The man answered, “Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. 31We know that God does not listen to sinners but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. 32Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. 33If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” 34They answered him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” And they drove him out.

This is a story not only of an act of kindness, a faith-based healing, but also an act of courage and defiance on the part of the healed person, when subjected to obviously biased and unfair questioning by the Pharisees. And the Apostle John also participates, by remembering this remarkable event and bringing it to our attention.

But it all starts out with a question about the cause of a man’s blindness: was it *his* sin or his *parents’*? Neither one! Jesus says. This has happened so that God’s works may be revealed in him. Most important for us is the fact that Jesus rejects the idea that physical affliction is caused by human sin. The blindness was simply not the result of anyone’s sin, Jesus says.

Before the age of modern science, people assumed that deformities and illnesses were the result of either a curse or a punishment from God. They assumed that righteous people were rewarded with health and wealth. Even today, some people still hold such beliefs. Jesus rejects that view, holding a more advanced view. Neither deformity nor poverty are a punishment from God. They are an opportunity for ministry.

And Jesus ministers to the guy at his own level of understanding. In Jesus’ time, there was widespread belief in the power of a holy man’s spittle, so Jesus used his spittle to make a paste with clay, spreading it on the fellow’s eyes, and telling him to go wash it off in the pool of Siloam, Jerusalem’s ever-flowing spring, which had an aura of holiness, in people’s minds.

This is how Jesus involved the man in his own healing, by having him get up and go do something. The man’s faith and hope were probably arising in his heart as he made his way to Siloam. He knew the layout of the town well enough to be able to navigate his way to the famous pool. And there he experienced the healing. The healing of a man born blind was something not heard of “since the world began” (9:32). This man was not a terribly pious or philosophic individual, but he knew quite well just how extraordinary this event was.

So when the Pharisees called him to their hall near the Temple and tried to get him to say that his healer was a sinner, he responded first with factual clarification, and then with justified indignation at their unfairness, their attempts to bully him into condemning Jesus.

The crowning insult, in the eyes of the Pharisees, is when the man resorts to sarcasm, responding to one of their repetitive questions by saying, “I have told you already and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?” (9:27). I can almost hear him saying this.

The suggestion of becoming a disciple of Jesus horrifies the Pharisees, and they “revile him” (9:28), saying they are disciples of Moses, but they don’t know where *this* healer comes from. And this man finds *that* very interesting. “You do not know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes,” something unheard of from the foundation of the world (9:30, 32). We know God wouldn’t listen to this Jesus if he were not from God. And if Jesus were not from God he couldn’t do these things (9:31, 33). They cannot tolerate the man’s reasonable logic. The Pharisees call him a sinner and drive him out.

This is a case where a recipient of Jesus’ healing becomes a spokesperson for the truth. When the evangelist John comments in the Greek language about the pool of Siloam, that it “means ‘sent’” (9:7), he uses the word *apestalmenos*, a Greek cognate with our word “apostle,” which means “sent one.” We see that the gospel is not only about Jesus; it’s also about all the people whom Jesus touches and turns into exceptional people. This healed man becomes an apostle of truth to the Sanhedrin council, the religious court. The Sadducees, the conservative priests, would have been on this council too, but this story focuses on the *Pharisees’* role, and really, on their embarrassment. These well-respected scribes and experts on the law are easily befuddled by the words of a person who has experienced a miracle, and who refuses to join them in telling lies about the healer. And we know from our own experience how Jesus’ touch can change someone’s life.

This is another example of how Jesus enlists ordinary people to help him spread the word of truth. This man became the truth-telling witness who shames the proud and haughty scholars. His remark, “Do you also want to become his disciples?” How beautiful is that?

We, too, can become apostles, loosely speaking. We can become people “sent” to testify to what Jesus has done for us. It does not require a miracle for it to be important. One thing that happened to me when Jesus touched me, is that life and humanity and history became more meaningful to me. That may not seem earth-shattering, but it is very important. Human life was no longer random and chaotic, but there was someone involved who was trying to get us out of the whirlpool and back on track, because life is a matter of making progress toward God. This is the meaning of his saying “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt 5:48). This can become our life goal, leading us on toward a perfection we will never *fully* achieve, compared to God, but which signals our growth God*ward*. Growing toward God is what makes life meaningful.

How has Jesus helped you get back on track? How has he made life meaningful and valuable? How has he directed you toward your life task of growing closer to God? You get to co-write the rest of the story.