

“Jesus Corrects Our Vision”

Date: March 22, 2020

Place: Lakewood UMC

Occasion: Lent 4, Year A

Text: John 9:1-41

Themes: Conversion, Change, Vision

James Moore shares this fascinating list of things that children have learned the hard way. I think you may get a chuckle.

- No matter how hard you try, you cannot baptize a cat.
- You can't trust your dog to watch your food for you.
- School lunches stick to the wall.
- You can't hide a piece of broccoli in a glass of milk.

Aren't they great! Now it is virtually certain that the children learned these great truths after some dramatic, eye-opening experience in their own lives. Can't you just see in your mind's eye.... some child trying to baptize a cat....trying to hide yucky a piece of broccoli in their milk?

The point is clear – a dramatic, personal, eye-opening experience can give us new insight, a new perspective, a new vision. On a much deeper level and on a much more positive level, that is precisely what we discover in this amazing story in John 9.

A man born blind has a dramatic eye-opening experience with Jesus... and, talk about new vision, he is *completely* healed. He is made whole and he comes back from the pool of Siloam with 20/20 vision, able to see perfectly for the first time in his life.

His transformation is so complete and so dramatic that he even looks a little different. The townspeople see him and say, “Isn't that the blind beggar? He can see now. Is that him? No, it's just someone who looks like him. Couldn't be him.” And the formerly blind man says, “It's me alright. I am the man.”

There is so much in this story that we could be here for a very long time. But just a couple of points this morning: First, there is an interesting theological point that is made in this passage. Jesus made it *very* clear that the reason this man was blind was *not* as punishment from God.

There was a train of thought in Jesus' time, and it persists today, that the reason people get sick or have problems is because they have sinned and God is punishing them. Good people are exempt from the pain and problems of the world, and bad things only happen to bad people.

When Jesus was asked *why* was this man born blind – was it because of his own sin or the sin of his parents, Jesus debunks this whole line of thinking. His answer? “Neither! When we meet people who are sick or who have problems, it is an opportunity to do good.”

In Jesus' time, blind people, or lame people or leprous people were looked down upon by society as sinners, as wicked people and they were shunned. But Jesus didn't see them as sinners, or as wicked people. He saw them as children of God, as persons of integrity and worth, as members of God's family, as His brothers and sisters. And he loved them and embraced them and enjoyed them, and he healed them.

Dear friends, whenever there is a natural disaster, or a new outbreak of a disease – like AIDS or COVID-19, there will be some preachers who will jump on the bandwagon and tell people that it is God's punishment for their sins. Hogwash! Disease is no respecter of people's moral character. The good and the naughty both get sick. Don't buy this line of thinking. It's bad theology. Jesus rejected it, and so should you.

When people are hurting, when people are sick it is an opportunity for the goodness in all God's people to shine. For those of us who have been touched and changed by the life of Jesus Christ, our eyes have been

opened, and we see the world differently. Jesus corrects our vision. In the song “Amazing Grace” we sing, “I once was blind but now I see.” We see ourselves differently; we see other people differently; and we see God differently. Let me explain.

First, when Christ opens our eyes it changes the way we see ourselves. Listen! You and I were both born blind. Babies are born blind. Please hear me; I love babies, and I’m not talking about their physical sight, but rather their spiritual sight.

Babies are born blind, like the man in our story today, by the cataracts of selfishness. They see every person as someone who exists solely for their benefit and comfort. That’s just the way babies are. They come into the world screaming, “Do something for me. Feed me. Love me. Hold me. Burp me. Change me. Rock me. And I want it right now!”

That’s the way it is for the first years of life, and if we’re not careful that attitude carries through childhood and into the teen years and sadly even into adulthood. It’s Me, Me, Me. Take care of me. Do for me. Cater to me. Please give me. Pamper me.

But then Jesus brings us up short because time and time again in the gospels he makes it clear that one of the things that blinds us is selfishness And the only cure is to have your eyes touched by Jesus. When Jesus gives us our spiritual eyes we move from selfish vision to service vision. We move from “Do something for me,” to “Let me do for God and others.”

Let me ask you something. Have you had your eyes touched by Jesus? Can you see beyond your own selfish desires? Can you see yourself, not as one selfishly pampered, but as one committed to be God’s servant in the world?

I have seen the contrast in the way people have responded to the

COVID-19 virus. One parishioner emailed me, early in the crisis, to ask if I knew of anyone who needed errands to be run; he was willing to do that. On the other hand, I have heard stories of people stockpiling toilet paper and hand sanitizer and then turning around and selling it online for marked up prices – so they could make a profit at someone else’s expenses.

One person’s eyes had been christened, opened by Christ and he was thinking of others. Another was so spiritually blind they could think only of themselves. Jesus changes the way we think of ourselves.

Second, when your eyes have been christened, opened by Jesus, it changes the way you see other people. A fellow by the name of Tim Bruster tells a powerful story about a mom who took her children to a crowded restaurant one day. Her six-year old son asked if he could say the grace. Mom agreed.

He prayed: “God is great and God is good. Let us thank him for the food, and God I would thank you even more if Mom gets us ice cream for dessert. And liberty and justice for all. Amen.”

Along with the laughter from the other customers nearby, the woman at the very next table growled loudly, “That’s what’s wrong with this country. Kids today don’t even know how to pray. The very idea... asking God for ice cream! Why, I never!”

Hearing this, the 6-year old boy burst into tears and he asked his mother, “Did I do it wrong? I’m sorry. Is God mad at me?” The little boy’s mother pulled him over into her lap. She hugged him tightly and assured him that he had done a terrific job with his prayer, and God was certainly not mad at him.

Just then, an elderly man walked over to the table. He winked at the boy and said, “I know God really well. We visit every day and I happen to

know that God loved your prayer. It may have been the best one he heard all day.” Really?” the little boy asked. “Cross my heart,” said the man. Then he leaned over and whispered in the little boy’s ear. Pointing at the woman at the next table who had made the remark that started the whole thing, he said, “Too bad she never asks God for ice cream. A little ice cream is good for the soul sometimes.”

Naturally the mom ordered ice cream for her kids at the end of the meal. The little six-year old boy stared at his for moment and then he did something that no one in the restaurant that day will ever forget.

He picked up his sundae and without a word walked over and placed it in front of the woman at the next table. With a big smile he said to her, “Here, this is for you. Ice cream is good for the soul sometimes and my soul is good already.”

The people in the restaurant applauded and somewhere in heaven Jesus was smiling...because that little boy had already learned how to look at others with the eyes of sacrificial love. Sight, true sight, is always a matter of the heart.... not the eyes.

When our eyes are anointed with the Spirit of Christ, then we see people differently. We see them as part of God’s family. And we accept them and embrace them and help them and treat them with respect and love. That’s what it means to have our eyes opened by Jesus.

When our eyes have been christened, it changes the way we see ourselves, and it changes the way we see other people.

Third and finally, it changes the way we see God. There’s something fascinating that happens here in John 9. Don’t miss this now. Notice the way the healed man refers to Jesus. Notice the growth. There is a magnificent progression here as he sees more and more clearly.

Look at this. First he refers to Jesus as “a man.” He says, “The man Jesus did this for me.” Next, he calls Jesus a prophet. He says, “To be able to do this he must be a prophet.” Then, in that intimate moment at the end he sees Jesus as the Son of God. And finally he claims Jesus as “The Lord of his life.

Look at this now. The closer he gets to Jesus, the more time he spends with Jesus then the clearer he sees God. And that’s the way it works for us too.

Jesus changes the way we look at ourselves. Jesus changes the way we look at others. And Jesus changes the way we look at God. May it be so in your life as well. Amen.

This sermon borrow heavily from James W. Moore, “Encounters with Christ,” 2001.