

John 9:1-41
Fourth Sunday in Lent
March 15, 2026

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

[Jesus said], “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

You may begin to notice a few themes or trends in the chosen Gospel readings for these Sundays in Lent. A first theme is the focus on Christ as our salvation – first, it was Israel reduced to One, then “the only begotten Son,” then the Spring of Living Water, and today the Light of the World that gives sight to those blinded by sin.

A second trend might also be noticed – the *length* of our Gospel Readings! It’s a feature perhaps unique to (or, at least, most noticeable in) John’s gospel... that the accounts focus not only on what *signs* Jesus does and what *promises* Jesus declares, but also how would-be followers wrestle with what it all means – Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman at the well, and now the blind man, Pharisees, and other onlookers. These occasions make clear that faith does not come from seeing or rationalizing the things of God – even those right there on the scene did not believe it! To believe is a gift from Jesus; to not believe is the natural cynicism of fallen man.

In that vein, a third theme you might notice is the struggle between belief and unbelief, whether that be Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, or the scene in this morning's text... even the blind man's progression, if you will, from saying Jesus is a man... Jesus is a prophet... Jesus is Lord.

Indeed, it's this wrestling to respond to the miracle that is the true focus of the account, isn't it? It's not really the miracle itself that is the focus – the description of *that* lasts only a few verses – but the vast majority of the text is about sinners wrestling over what to make of it all. It's not unlike the Gospel in general: the Gospel itself is very simple and need not have lengthy explanation: Christ came into the world and redeemed us through His sacrificial substitution, and now pours out the benefits in the gifts He freely gives as they bring us to eternal life. That's the Gospel. It's that succinct. But, all of the energy of every generation seems to be fixated on whether it's believable, how to wrestle with what has been presented before my very eyes – “Do I believe the promise and receive the gifts of faith? Or is this Jesus a fraud, so that his appeal to divine forgiveness and Christian love is just some fairytale? Who'd actually live according to that?” That's really the heart of the whole world's wrestling, isn't it?

Yes, John's account gives us great opportunity to see the various ways in which sinners wrestle with the call to believe that the

Christ is on the scene and the Gospel is at work, and we can put ourselves into the shoes of each of these groups of sinners.

First, the neighbors. Initially, they wrestle with the very fact of the matter – “Could this have actually just happened?” And then, they ask the man to explain *how* it happened (as if, he should be able to *explain* it!). And then, they bring the man before the Pharisees so that the religious authorities can pass judgment on the matter.

Doesn't this sound a lot like how our society handles the Gospel – first, in disbelief that it could ever happen. Yes, how many even deny the historicity of Jesus (the most attested to man in all of ancient history!), the objective truth of his sacraments! Then, when it's shown to be true history from 2000 years ago with promises that reach into the present day and pour out divine gifts, they cynically ask *how* such things could be. And *then*, when they are given answers too simple and straightforward to argue against, they run to their religious authorities (most often, nowadays, that's Google or “influencers”) and look for those authorities to render judgment. Nothing new under the sun in the skepticism of the world!

The second group of sinners we can learn from are the Pharisees. The Pharisees ought remind us of the religiously-minded who attack the Gospel in two ways: first, they appeal to the law and whether the Gospel supposedly contradicts and opposes God's holiness. Thus, the Pharisees appeal immediately to this healing happening on the Sabbath! “Can't be from God!” they claim. So also

with those who want to turn Baptism into man's work, Absolution into man's invention, the Supper into man's unbloody sacrifice: "Can't be from God" they claim, "because the holy God wouldn't allow such things of human hands on His Sabbath."

But, if that argument falls flat, the Pharisees simply apply pressure upon those who know the truth – yes, divide and conquer is a good strategy – and they interrogate the parents, who instinctively know the danger of confessing the truth and so throw their son to the wolves to save their own skin.

Perhaps in the parents we see ourselves most clearly: privately we know what the truth *is*, but will we confess it if it means losing what is precious to us? We'd rather have someone else shoulder the burden of living out the truth, as we quietly slink away, afraid of the repercussions if those who have authority over me, my life, or my heart should find out I know this truth of Christ. It's amazing (and should be amazingly embarrassing) that we would rather hide the Gospel meant to save the whole world than confess it openly to the world, even if just our loved ones, who so desperately need it and would so eternally benefit from it. God grant us strength when it's our turn to confess the truth and not, like the parents to their son, throw our loved ones under the bus to preserve my comforts in this life.

The focus on the parents momentarily distracts us from the Pharisees, but the Pharisees' response again takes center stage in

the subsequent argument with the blind man. Another appeal to the law: “We are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.” And, quite predictably, when the man counters the supposed ‘wise’ with the simple truth, they resort to destroying his reputation and self-flattery: “You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?” Don’t the Scriptures say that the cross is foolish to those who are perishing? The foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of man. Doesn’t St Paul say that “God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are.”

Yes, as much as we can see ourselves in each of these groups – the neighbors, the parents, the Pharisees – it ought make us uncomfortable and repentant to have to admit as much. We ought not remain there, but flee to the cross, flee to Christ, and ask Him to give us true sight.

And this brings us to the man-born-blind and the truth that, if not for Christ, he would be no different than the others. Did you notice that? The man did not believe Jesus on his *own* accord. Nor did he believe Jesus to be Lord because of the miracle’s temporal benefit. It was not until Jesus *came to him* – Jesus *found* him, the text says – and spoke into his ears the *desire* to believe and the *truth* to believe that the man confessed his joy in the truth.

Notice that: Jesus spoke into the man the desire to believe –
“Do you believe in the Son of Man?”

“Who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?”

(It’s like it wasn’t even a thought to him before that this man who he confessed to be *from* God may have something more for him than temporal well-being.)

And then, Jesus speaks into his ears the *truth* to believe:

“You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.”

Now, consider carefully what this exchange between Jesus and the man means for *you*. (We’ve put ourselves in all the others’ shoes... put yourself in the man’s shoes.) The “experience” did not bring the man to the knowledge of the truth. Nor did the man “choose” to believe. Jesus brought faith to him and brought him to faith.

In other words, this account ought teach you to rejoice that *for you to trust in Jesus is itself the Gospel at work*. For you to believe the good news of the Christ is itself the good news at work. We so often like to think of the Gospel as some object out there to be analyzed, rationalized, critiqued... then, “perhaps I will choose to accept it.” No, that’s not it. To be sure, the Gospel is true ‘out there’ – an objectively blood-stained cross and objectively empty tomb... objectively-promised divine gifts of tangible form, to be felt on the forehead, heard in the ear, received on the tongue. Yes, those things are all outside of us. But they’re not ‘dead icons’ of a gospel story,

for us to critique and analyze and make decisions over. They are the living Christ at work among us and for us.

In short, your faith is itself the Gospel at work. That you believe is a gift of Christ: “By grace have you been saved, through faith, and this not of yourselves, it is a gift of God.” Otherwise said, that you are even here this morning is evidence of the ongoing, present-tense work of the Holy Spirit, who works faith in each heart through those objective tools of the Gospel and calls, gathers, enlightens and strengthens the whole company of those who believe that Jesus Christ is Lord. Yes, what a treasure is yours! And what a treasure *you* are to God and a joy to every servant of God... who sees in you the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit!

This is how completely you are a beneficiary of the love of God in Christ Jesus – that even your faith is not of yourself, but is the gift of God, planted in your heart. As Jesus explains when silencing the Pharisees, those who assume they see by their own strength prove how blind they are, and their guilt remains because they trust in themselves. But those who confess their utter blindness have reason to hope... for the gracious Lord comes and finds them (found you!) and brings them (brought you!) out of darkness and into His marvelous light.

Is this not exactly the Gospel He promised? – not just that He would die for a world who, then, ‘better know how to find their way to his saving cross!'; but, included in the Gospel is the promise that

the living Christ would actively come find you – “I will lead the blind in a way that they do not know, in paths they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light... Look, you blind, that you may see!” Yes, Christ actively sought you out and found you... to be sure, through instruments and connections and seeming coincidences, just as he pinpointed the man whom he “happened to be” passing by. The man had no clue what was coming to him that day; he didn’t wake up and say, “Today, I am going to look for the Gospel of eternal salvation.” Instead, Jesus *saw* him and knew the work of God would be displayed in him.

That is something you may always cherish for yourself – Christ sought you out, even as an infant of faithful parents, for He knew the work of God would be displayed in you being brought to believe and forever be beneficiary of that divine adoption and live out that baptismal life. That is the universal Gospel applied just to you.

But that should also move you to cherish the same for your loved ones. Why would you wait to bring them to where Jesus is at work? Why would you wait for them to say, “You know, today I am going to look for the Gospel of eternal salvation”? Why would you wring your hands and worry whether they’ll “like it”? You know as well as I do that, by human nature, they’ll *never* like it of their own accord. Their Old Adam, like the neighbors, the parents, the pharisees, their Old Adam would rebuff the simple mystery of it all.

But that's not how the Gospel works. Jesus did not send out salesmen; he sent out fishers. He does not send them equipped with a powerless personal testimony and lifeless ordinances; He sends them with the divine Word and life-giving Sacraments that give you Christ Himself. And, through them, Jesus passes by those who are spiritually blind (almost like a passing rain shower to benefit the parched land)... Jesus passes by, that the works of God might be displayed in them.

In other words, we say to our loved ones (remember from Epiphany, as Andrew said before us), "Come and see" ... we urge that of them *not* because we are begging them to like our church or the service. We're not selling them on it nor seeking their approval. We say to our loved ones "Come and see" because we beg Christ to do His divine service for them and upon them and in them... we ask Jesus to do as He promised and "work the works of God" in their heart and life while it is still day; "for night is coming when no one can work." Yes, we rightly confess that Christ will come again in His glory. He himself says that in our text: "For judgment I came into this world..." To carry out the judgment of the holy and merciful God, Jesus came into the world – and, as it is *still* day, He is still graciously at work in this world, *where* He promises to be found, serving His Church – so that those who do not see may see, and those who think that in themselves they see may be shut blind.

God grant us all great joy that our own faith is God's mercy toward us, the result of Christ at work among us and for us and in us, that we may confess before all, "As long as *Christ* is in the world, He is the *light* of the world."

In the Name of the Father
And of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit.
+ AMEN +

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