

John 9.1-41

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; night is coming when no one can work. 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). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.

8The neighbours and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" 9Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." 10But they kept asking him, "Then 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." 12They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

13They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. 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. 17So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet." 18The 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 19and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was

born blind? How then does he now see?” 20His parents answered, “We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; 21but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.” 22His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. 23Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.” 24So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, “Give glory to God! We know that 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? How did he open your eyes?” 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, and 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.

35Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” 36He answered, “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.” 37Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.” 38He said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped him.

39Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.” 40Some of the

Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not blind, are we?” 41 Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.

Introduction to the theme of the day-

These conversations from John’s Gospel point to what it looks like when we say God so loved the world. This conversation rests between Jesus speaking at length about being light in the world and later as a shepherd, willing to give his life for the sheep and while he’s at it, bringing abundant life for everyone.

## SERMON

Recently, someone shared with me their experience of social isolation that comes with losing their sight and memory. Maybe it’s that the rest of us look away because we don’t know how to interact. Maybe on some primal level we fear life circumstances like disability, mental illness, addiction and poverty are contagious. We just don’t want to ‘go there’

Jesus “goes there”. Just like he takes the long way around through Samaria, he looks for outcasts outside the very temple he himself has been chucked out from. Jesus finds someone was blind since birth. Jesus sees a child of God where the disciples see a theological case study: “*OK who’s the sinner here?—-seeing how this person is suffering and all.*”

Telling the story would be simpler if we knew the person’s name. Then again, we might need to live through the awkwardness of describing this person...our words reveal a lot about how we see people. Do we define this human based only in terms of disability or a moral category? Or do we speak of this person as one who has just received sight? Dare we even call them ‘child of God’?

Imagine seeing for the very first time. How would you make sense of things you've felt, tasted, touched but never saw? What about when we see something we've never encountered before?

The religious leaders spot only problems when they encounter a person who has just received sight—How do we account for a medical marvel? How do we reconcile our categories of sinners and sinning with this person being healed from blindness? *“We could call the whole event a hoax. Probably faked the blindness, let's haul in the family and expose the ruse.”*

The family won't speak up for fear of being shunned. So, the religious leaders interrogate the person just healed. They scrutinize him with suspicion *“...probably in league with that rabble rouser we keep tossing from our religious gatherings because he claims to be the Messiah.”* Their solution *vis a vis* this newly healed person is expulsion—'out of sight, out of mind'.

It's not always true seeing is believing. From the outside, people often think our faith is a matter of being convinced of something—“believing”. Once convinced, we behave a prescribed ways so that we can belong.

Gospel works in reverse. We belong first. God comes looking for us just as Jesus looks (twice) for a person ignored by the temple for his blindness and later excommunicated from the temple once he does see.

Our understanding changes just as it does for our friend with new sight. Early on, he thinks Jesus is some random guy, maybe a prophet who healed him. Now as he and Jesus talk he sees more. He sees Jesus as God's chosen one who will bring about a whole new world and eventually restore all things.

We live in relationship and our eyes are open to seeing things in new ways—rethinking our biases and prejudices. God willing, we begin living in

new ways. The Gospel truth is that it all starts with belonging...not the we join the club kind of belonging, but the God's love has found us kind of belonging. God so loving the world, takes the form of Jesus befriending an outcast and healing him. God so loving the world also looks like a world transforming and restored to what God hoped and dreamed it would be all along.