



## SUNDAY SERMON

# Biblical Paradigm Shift

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*The Gospel according to John, chapter 9, verses 1 to 41.*

*As Jesus walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. The 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?" Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" He 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." They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know." They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. Then 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." Some 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. So 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." The Jewish leaders 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 and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but 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." His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders; for they had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him." So 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." He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" He 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?" Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but 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."*

### DATE

The Fourth Sunday in Lent  
Sun., Mar. 26, 2017

### PREACHER

The Rev. Jason Cox

### READINGS

I Samuel 16:1-13  
Psalm 23  
Ephesians 5:8-14  
John 9:1-41

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*The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out. Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him. Jesus 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." Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains."*

Loving God, open our eyes and help us to see the world as it is. Amen.

The bible is chock full of metaphors for the human condition, and they all point to one truth: left to our own devices, things don't look good. On our own, we are broken, lost, in bondage. But for all of the different ways we are in trouble, there is a solution. We are broken, but God wants to make us whole. We are in bondage in our metaphorical Egypt; but God is coming to liberate us. We have been exiled from our true home, but God is calling us to return. We are dead — but God wants to raise us to new life.

All of these metaphorical pairs point to the great Biblical Paradigm Shift—from the way of the world into the way of God's Kingdom. On this side of the line, we live our lives in bondage to Egypt, slaves to the wealth of empire, motivated by greed and selfishness and pride. We are controlled by anxiety and scarcity and fear.

But God is calling us to cross over into a new way of being: to live as if the truth were true, to live by God's values instead of the world's. Where others see scarcity, we see abundance. And in place of fear, we are moved by love.

Today's metaphor for this paradigm shift is that we are blind—but God offers us sight. Jesus sets the action in motion by spitting on the ground and using the mud he makes to apply a healing salve to the blind man's eyes—a concrete solution to a literal problem. But this man's physical blindness is beside the point really: very quickly we move from physical to spiritual blindness.

The Pharisees in this story see well enough with their eyes, but they can't see anything with their hearts. They're so concerned that Jesus has broken the rules and healed someone on the sabbath, they can't even see how this man's life has been transformed. All they can see is that Jesus is breaking the rules, and breaking them in such a way that God's power is unleashed, set free from control by petty, literal minded men like themselves. The pharisees believed that only men like themselves should control access to God. But if anyone can access God anytime and anywhere, how's a pharisee supposed to make a living?

God wants to open our eyes this morning, but it's not going to be easy. The world is set up to make us afraid: afraid we won't have enough, afraid of how others see us, afraid we might lose our place in the scheme of things. So we hold on tight to what we have and we fight to keep things the way they are. We turn away from what we don't want to see, and allow ourselves to be blinded by wealth and comfort. We choose blindness, because reality is too much to bear. And the barrier between us, and the people we don't want to see, grows. What will it take to crack open this shell, to penetrate this thick, protective hide we've grown, to remove the scales from our eyes and see the world as God sees?

Because that's what we're really talking about, isn't it? In the passage from Samuel, God sends the prophet on a quest to find the next king of Israel. Samuel knows that it will be one of Jesse's sons, but he isn't sure which. He just assumes that the one God wants is the oldest and the strongest. "But the Lord said to Samuel, 'Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.'"

In order for us to begin to see things as God does, we've got to get close enough to see what's inside, close enough to look upon the heart. A couple of weeks ago, John Sides and Perry Swope and I drove out to Philippi, in West Virginia, to find out where our young people would be serving this summer on our annual Appalachian service project. St. Columba's has had a connection with this little West Virginia town for more than 25 years now, and we have deep relationships in the community.

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I know that I can never fully understand the stresses, and the joys, of living in this beautiful but economically challenged part of America. But I believe we've got a much better shot at understanding one another, of bridging divides and connecting hearts, because we keep going back there, and sitting down across the table to share a meal. We look one another in the eyes. We share a story, or a joke. We sing songs together. And slowly, our hearts are knit together. And slowly, our eyes are opened.

My eyes have been opened because of encounters like this in my life: because I had to get up close and personal with people who were different. I had to ask them questions, and share stories, and build relationships. You can learn some of this stuff from a think piece in the Atlantic or the New Yorker. But no piece of writing can capture the contours of a real human life. You have to get close enough to look someone in the eyes to do that. Close enough that you can see what's in their heart.

Sermons aren't going to open your eyes any more than those think pieces will. If God is going to open your eyes, heal your brokenness, bring you to life in his presence, you're going to have to seek that outside these doors. If you don't know where to start, look at the service and outreach pages on our website. But the point is not to help people, not really. The point is to meet people. To get close enough that relationship is possible.

We are here this morning to get ready for the journey ahead, the paradigm shift journey from the world the way it is, to a world the way God intends it to be. The bread of this table is strength for that road: don't squander it. Use it to fuel your quest to become a whole person, a fully human being, with open eyes and a heart as generous as God created it to be.

Amen.