

Now I See

March 26, 2017

John 9:1-41

First United Methodist Church, Lindstrom

(This is a manuscript prepared for sermon delivery and may not represent actual words spoken.)

He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see."

Last week we looked at an encounter a Samaritan woman had with Jesus. Today we are looking at an encounter a blind man had with Jesus.

As you know, there are a lot of things I do not know. The third thing of the three things I know for sure is I don't know. And I am not flippant about that. I am quite serious. There are people who do know...or claim to know. So I just let them know and be right...if they think they are right. Me...I wrestle with stuff...and I learn more stuff...and I could tell you more than one story about how I thought I knew something...but later found out I did not know as much as I thought I knew.

Let me tell you one thing I do know. I know Jesus. There is so much more I can learn and know about Jesus. But I know Jesus. The relationship is growing. And for that knowledge I will be grateful all the way into eternity. My desire is that people who know me would also know Jesus. I also know what Jesus has done for me.

A couple of weeks ago Laurie and I were on a little vacation. We were with two other couples. The guys—David Brown and Phil Strom—and I make up a covenant group. One evening we were sitting around a fire...talking and sharing. Dave shared how he was so grateful for how God had healed one of his sons of some physical issues he had since childhood...some of the same physical issues one of my grandsons is dealing with. The healing happened over time. Much prayer was involved. Phil then shared how he had prayed long and hard that his sister-in-law be healed

of her cancer. She died. This led to some great discussion about prayer and answered prayer and God's responses to our prayers...and why even pray.

I've prayed and witnessed people being healed. Many have been healed over the course of time with much praying and with the intervention of physicians and medicine. There was one rather miraculous healing. Just one.

Some of you may have heard this story. A woman in a church I served many years ago was diagnosed with cancer. It was a diagnosis that was confirmed by doctors at Mayo Clinic. The prognosis was not good. I was visiting with her. She told me about some faith healer she had heard of. She asked my opinion about faith healers. I gave her my opinion. I was not shy about offering her my opinion because I knew more then than I do now. And I told her I would pray for her healing. So before I left, I laid hands on her. I prayed. I prayed that God would heal her. I prayed that God would remove that cancer. That woman lived for many years after that prayer. Her next visit to the doctor revealed no cancer.

I don't know. But praise God! Amen? I don't know why some of our prayers are responded to in different ways. I wondered why God chose to answer that prayer for that woman in such a powerful way...because her family's initial response was a desire to bring a lawsuit for mis-diagnosis and emotional distress. I talked them out of that. People want to know why some are healed and some are not. Both of my parents got sick. I prayed for their healing. They died...way too young. Why are some blessed and others not? Why does good happen to bad folks...and bad happen to good folks?

Now the purpose here is not to get into a discussion about prayer. We always need to pray. Pray without ceasing. That's what I will say about prayer today. Do it, and don't stop doing it. Nor is the purpose to get into a discussion about why God seems to act differently or answer prayer in different ways. That is a discussion for some other time. God has told us quite plainly, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts (way above) your thoughts." So there is that. God's ways and thoughts are so much higher than ours. There is this chasm, this distance, between God's ways and our ways. And so sometimes we just need to say, "I don't know." And trust that one day God will fill in the gaps.

Still, we question. Believe me, I question. Why this? Why that? Why does this happen? Why is that person so blessed? When am I going to get my big break in life? Some question God. Who is God that he allowed this...or did not intervene there? Who is this Jesus we follow who seems to heal some and not others...who seems to allow rain to fall on both the good and the bad? On and on.

We read the story of an encounter a blind man had with Jesus. The Gospel of John contains a few encounters between Jesus and individuals. There was Nicodemus. Last week, as I said, we looked at the woman at the well. Next week we will look at Jesus' encounter with Lazarus.

But, quickly, this story we read today. Jesus encountered a man who had been blind from birth. He had never seen a thing. Common thinking of that day was someone sinned, and this blindness was a punishment for that sin. The disciples wondered if it was the blind man or his parents who had sinned. Couldn't have been the blind man. He was born blind. Must have been his parents. But Jesus said this blindness was not the result of any particular sin. But the glory of God would be revealed in the healing of this man.

This was a rather unique healing. The man was not healed instantly—as some others were. This healing involved spit and dirt and mud. Jesus rubbed the stuff on the guy's eyes. An old-fashioned poultice. Jesus told him to go wash in a certain pool. The man obeyed and went and washed and was healed.

Know what this means? It means, among other things, that this blind man did not see Jesus. Jesus would later find the blind man and ask him if he believed in him...believed in the Son of Man. The blind man asked, "Who is he sir? Tell me so that I may believe in him." This was the first time the blind man had actually seen Jesus. So Jesus said, "You have now seen him...." Now seen him.

Meanwhile...back at the healing. The man's neighbors were now seeing the man in a new context. He could see, but they could not. They did not recognize him at first. He wasn't stumbling along or being led along. The neighbors were confused. So they brought the man to the Pharisees. The Pharisees launched a full scale investigation.

Let me tell ya a thing or two about those Pharisees. They were smart. They knew just about everything. All you had to do was ask one of them. They would tell you so. They were book smart. They knew their Old Testament Scriptures. They knew the law. They knew nothing about grace. But, boy, they sure could quote that law and apply it to just about everything. They were also real good at quoting the law out of context. In their learned opinion, Jesus had violated the law. See...that mud he made? He made it on the Sabbath. You just could not be making mud on the Sabbath. Couldn't heal on the Sabbath. Sound absurd. It still happens.

And so the investigation and the arguing continued. The parents were questioned. The blind man was questioned a couple of times. He told the same story. In the end, the holy and righteous Pharisees told the man, "You were steeped in sin at birth...." They were in to that he-was-born-blind-so-someone-sinned thing...steeped in sin from birth. Then they asked him, "How dare you lecture us? How

dare you lecture us? We know stuff. You are a common, uneducated sinner.”

Jesus then went on to teach the obvious lesson about spiritual blindness.

But here is the deal...the one thing I get out of all this. The Pharisees kept at this man. They wanted answers. Puts me in mind of that scene from the movie *A Few Good Men*. They wanted answers. They wanted the truth. But they couldn't handle the truth...because the truth was and is, “I don't know.” The man said, “I don't know.” That is a powerful answer. His answer got more powerful. “But one thing I do know. I was blind but now I see.”

So I wonder sometimes: can we handle the truth if the truth is I don't know? In fact, all I do know is I was blind but now I see. I was lost but now am found. Is it okay if that is all we know? I sure hope so.

Allow me a little confession. I have never seen Jesus. By that I mean I have never seen Jesus in the flesh. I have not seen Jesus in a dream or in a vision. I haven't. I know some who say they have...and have heard Jesus speak to them. Great. I have never once doubted that. But I have not.

Let me tell you what I have seen. I have seen sick people made better. I have seen broken hearts mended. I have seen despair replaced with joy. I have seen light overcome darkness. I have seen lives changed. I have seen mean people become nice people. I have seen sad people become happy people. I have not seen Jesus in the flesh or in a vision. But because of Jesus I have seen these other things. I'm saying that counts. That counts as seeing Jesus. And so I believe. That is my witness...my story...and I will stand by it.

And something else. I don't know the answers to a lot of those questions. I just don't know why I have seen Jesus work a certain way in one circumstance...but work differently in another circumstance...why this person was healed and that one was not...why this person experienced special blessing and all that. That's all God's call. And as was said earlier,

God's ways and thoughts are way above ours. I can attempt an answer. But, for the most part, I just don't know. I'm okay with that. But I do know this. Jesus saved me. I once was blind and lost, but now I see and am found. And I see Jesus at work.

So let me leave you with this challenge today...a little assignment for this week and beyond. Let's lay aside questionings and doubts. Look for those examples and those instances where you just see Jesus at work. A baby born. A sick person getting better. A person experiencing a little happiness and joy. Whatever. Take note of that. Say to yourself, “I see Jesus at work there.” And then try telling someone else.

That is our witness. Our most powerful and effective witness is not in what we know. It is in who we know...and how we experience and see Jesus at work in the midst of not knowing. The healed blind man had never seen Jesus. He did not know the answer to one question the smart people asked him. But he did know what he had experienced. And he did not hesitate to share that—even with the most learned. He was blind...then he saw. Powerful.

He replied, “Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!”