

Now I See

The gospel reading appointed for today was very long— forty-one verses. So I decided to have us hear part of it from the Bible and then to recap the story and continue it as it might have been told by the man whose eyes are opened by Jesus. It can be quite interesting to imagine oneself into a biblical story. Choosing a role and placing ourselves into the scene can open up aspects of the story we might not have seen before. So I invite you to hear the story of the blind man and Jesus and to imagine that you are hearing it fresh, as if it just happened.

Come and listen. I have something to tell you— something that will amaze you! Although you might have heard it already. All of Jerusalem is talking about it. You see, I used to be blind, and now I can see! Have you ever heard of anything like this? Here's how it happened.

There's not really much that a blind man can do for work, so each morning someone from my family would bring me to the main street here, and I would sit by the road and beg. I can tell you that when you're a beggar, you realize there are all kinds of people in the world. Most people acted as if I wasn't there, as if they were blind to me. I'd hear the sound of their feet going by, and their footsteps wouldn't even slow down. Others would pause long enough to throw a small coin or two into my bowl and then be on their way. Once in a while, someone would stop and speak to me like I was a real human being. Those were the ones I liked best. They helped to make up for the ones who spat on me or gave me a kick, just because they felt like it, I guess.

I never knew what to expect when I heard someone coming. I had to be prepared for just about anything. But what happened the other day was totally new and unexpected. I heard the shuffle of many feet, and I knew that a big group of people was coming. They stopped right in front of me so close that I could feel their robes brushing against my arms and feet. I was frightened. Well, wouldn't you be? I had no idea what they were going to do to me. And then I heard someone ask, "Teacher, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

Suddenly my fear turned to anger. I was being used as an object lesson, and this question touched a sore spot. It never seemed fair to me that kids should be punished for their parents' sins, the way it says in the Torah that God punishes children *for the iniquity of their parents to the third and fourth generation*. (Ex. 20:5) Why should I be punished with blindness because of something my parents or grandparents did? The prophet Ezekiel says, *A child shall not suffer for the iniquity of a parent . . . the righteousness of the righteous shall be his own, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be his own*. (Ez. 18:20) This seems a lot more fair to me— we're punished for our own sins, not someone else's— but then I don't see what kind of wickedness I could have done before I was even born.

So I was very interested in what this Rabbi would have to say. *“Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he said, he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him.”* It wasn't what I expected, and it didn't really explain anything. I didn't have a clue what he was talking about. I waited for them to move on, after I'd provided just another teachable moment for some head-in-the-clouds Rabbi and his spoiled students. Then I heard the sound of spitting and waited for the splat on my face. It never came. Instead there were some funny rustling noises, and then I felt something cool and damp being spread across my eyes. The Rabbi said, *“Go, wash in the pool of Siloam,”* and then he and his followers moved on.

It didn't matter to me where I washed, I just wanted to get that muck off my eyes. But when my nephew came to get me, and asked me why I had mud all over my face, I told him to take me to the pool of Siloam. I washed my eyes in the cool waters of the pool, and, when I dried them with the edge of my cloak, I suddenly found that I could see! My nephew still had to lead me home, because I didn't yet know what I was seeing. The houses, the streets, the people and animals in the streets— it was all new and wonderful to me.

Of course, all the neighbors started talking. *“Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?”* Some were saying “yes,” but others were saying, *“No, it's just someone who looks like him.”* I said, *“It's me! I'm the man!”* But they kept asking, *“Then how were your eyes opened?”* So I told them, *“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 wanted to know where he was, probably so they could see him perform another miracle, but I didn't know. I didn't even know what he looked like, did I?

So the neighbors brought me to the Pharisees at the synagogue. I guess they were hoping the Pharisees could explain what had happened. I had to tell the whole story all over again. The Pharisees seemed more interested in condemning Jesus for giving me my sight on the sabbath than in trying to understand how I could see. They got into a big argument, some of them saying, *“This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.”* But others were saying, *“How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?”*

Well they couldn't figure it out, so they decided that I must not really have been blind. Next thing you know, they dragged my parents into it. They called them in and asked, *“Is this your son, who you say was born blind?”* My folks said I was. *“How then does he now see?”* they wanted to know. *“He's definitely our son, and he was certainly born blind,”* my parents told them, *“but we have no idea of how he got his sight, nor do we know who opened his eyes.”*

They knew perfectly well, because I'd told them all about it. They even thought that Jesus might be the Messiah, the chosen one of God, because of what he had done for me, but they were afraid to say so. They were afraid of being banished from the synagogue. So they said, *“Ask him; he's old enough. He can speak for himself.”* Thanks Mom and Dad. Throw me under the camel, why don't you?

The Pharisees called me forward again. They insisted that Jesus was a sinner and tried to get me to say I was lying. *“Give glory to God!”* they insisted, meaning “tell the truth.” Well, I did tell the truth. I said, “I don’t know if he’s a sinner. I only know that I used to be blind, and now I see.” I did what those Pharisees asked me to do, I told them the truth, but it only got them more irritated. *“What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?”* They weren't the only ones who were getting irritated. “I’ve already told you, but you wouldn't listen. Why do you want to hear the whole story again? Do you want to become his disciples?”

I knew that would get to them and it did. *“You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we don't know where he comes from.”* “Well that’s pretty amazing,” I said, “You don't want to believe he comes from God, and yet he opened my eyes. *Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind.* If this man didn’t come from God, he could do nothing.” This was not what they wanted to hear, and so they turned on me, yelling, *“You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?”* And then they drove me out of the synagogue.

Jesus heard that they had driven me out, and he came looking for me. When he found me, he asked me the strangest question. *“Do you believe in the Son of Man?”* I wasn't sure who he was talking about, but I was ready to believe in anybody, if Jesus said so. “Who is he, sir?” I asked. *“Tell me, so that I may believe in him.”* Jesus said, *“You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.”* I looked into Jesus' eyes, and suddenly I saw— not just with the new eyes he had given me, but with the eyes of my heart. “Lord, I believe,” I said, and then I was down on my knees in front of him, hanging onto his hands for dear life, while the whole world seemed to swirl and shake around me. *“I came into this world for judgment,”* Jesus said, *“so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.”*

There were some Pharisees standing nearby, probably keeping an eye on both of us, and they said, “Surely we’re not blind, are we?” Jesus said to them, *“If only you were blind, then you would not be guilty of sin. But now that you claim to see, your sin remains.”* (Raymond Brown trans.) I’ve been puzzling over what Jesus meant by that. What do you think? The best I can come up with is that those Pharisees think they know all about God. But when someone does something that doesn’t fit with their ideas, *even though* it could only be done *through* God, they refuse to see it.

Jesus doesn’t fit in with their ideas about God. If they had never seen his power, they wouldn’t be guilty of denying him. But now that they *have* seen, it’s as if they are saying “no” to God. I guess there are different kinds of blindness. Thanks be to God, now I see!

Amen.

* Italicized quotes come directly from the scripture passage, while those in regular type are paraphrases.