

"Lent 4—Unexplainable"
March 26, 2017
Text: John 9:1-41

Island Heights UMC, Island Heights, NJ
Fourth Sunday in Lent

As he 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 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 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 Jews; for the Jews 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."

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.

Introduction—Dark to Light

In today's story the world is in darkness. The man is blind. But *all* the people are blind. All are yet to see the light. The disciples prove this when they ask Jesus a question based on an ancient understanding of life:

"Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

As in so many times in the Gospel accounts Jesus, once again sees an opportunity to reveal the nature of God. *"Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him."*

When the Spirit-led mission of Jesus the Christ meets with the deep and long-held desire of a person to see, the curse of darkness is about to be broken and light is about to shine.

"As long as I am in the world," Jesus says, "I am the light of the world."

The Gross Sign

But now, why does Jesus have to be so gross about it? I think we all have a notion of Jesus, which is tidy, proper and yes, even magnificent and powerful. But when it comes to Jesus, we do not think about things like spitting. This is what he does.

He spits on the ground and makes mud with the saliva and spreads the mud on the man's eyes, and says to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam."

What a creative miracle! Here's Jesus working with the same stuff that made Adam. He's simply using what is within reach to bring to life something that is not. And hey, the Irish know a good toast when they hear it. "Here's mud in your eye" actually means something!

And so, to the Pool of Siloam the man goes. It was a water supply within the walls of Jerusalem fed by an underground aqueduct built centuries ago by King Hezekiah. Not only did the pool provide daily sustenance, but each year in the festival of Succoth the high priests would ceremoniously bring water from the pool to pour out in the temple as a prayer for God's rain to fall on that year's crops.

But today, the man with mud in his eyes goes to the pool and washes and comes back able to see.

The Community Reacts

And then it all breaks loose. Word of mouth is buzzing through the streets. Everyone is pointing and staring at the man.

"Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?"

"Yeah, that's him!"

"No," others say, "but it is someone like him."

And even when he keeps saying, *"I am the man,"* they keep asking him, *"Then how were your eyes opened?"*

It's what everyone wants to know. It's what we want to know. How do miracles happen? Why do they happen sometimes, but not all times? What do we do to get a miracle?

He answers, "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 say to him, "Where is he?"

He says, "I do not know."

We want answers. We want proof. Yes, we see someone's life transformed before our very eyes, but is that God? A person is freed from addiction to alcohol. Once on their way to death, and now they have a new life. Is that the work of God? A person spends a life cheating others out of money, but now has given it all away and lives to serve others in need. Is that the work of God? A person flips the bird at God and walks away from faith, but now sees a light that turns their feet back around to walk in the other direction. Is that the work of God?

We all want to know if God is working in our lives or not.

Ask the Pharisees

One thing we can do is go to the leaders; the experts; the enlightened ones. Let's go see the ones who know about these kinds of things.

So the community brings this man who had been born blind to the Pharisees. But there is going to be a problem. Because all of this is happening on a sabbath day. Even something as wonderful as a healing is regarded as work; and work cannot be done on a sabbath day. Something's not right. God would not do this. The Bible is very clear about this. No work on the sabbath! We cannot be wrong about this. Ah, the lengths we will go to defend God, even from his own work.

So now the anxiously concerned Pharisees want to know how he received his sight.

He says to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see."

Then the arguing begins. Some of the Pharisees say, "This man is not from God, he does not observe the sabbath."

But others say, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?"

So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." Hear this, believers, these questions will come.

He said, "He is a prophet."

That doesn't help. They're all still in the dark.

Ask the Parents

Now the Pharisees need to get to the bottom of things. Blinded with angry

jealousy, they want answers. And they'll find them. They investigate the man's parents to see if any of this is true.

"Is this your son, was he born blind? How then does he now see?"

And then the saddest part of the story: it's a moment of truth, and it's paralyzed by fear.

"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."

A complete failure of community occurs when, for the sake of self-preservation, we turn their backs on our own children. A man sees his mom and dad for the first time, but because of strict societal systems and strongly held beliefs, he hears them say, "Go ask him. He is of age. He can speak for himself." Darkness remains.

Ask the Man—Again

We want to talk to him again. Find him. Bring him back. No more fooling around.

So they bring him back to the Pharisees who say to him, *"Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner."*

"I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that I was blind, but now I see."

Their question remains, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"

"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?"

Now he's crossed a line. *"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."*

But now the man is finding his new voice, a voice of faith, even a prophetic voice: *"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."*

He's preaching now, but he's messing with the wrong people. They say, *"You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.*

Mom and Dad's fear of being removed from synagogue has come to pass; but it's their son who is driven from community, even further away than when he was a blind beggar. The one who now sees sees an unseeing world that is lost in darkness.

Jesus Finds the Man

Of course this causes Jesus pain. His heart operates from compassion. For a child of God to be exiled from the house of God—from their community—breaks the heart of God. When Jesus hears the man has been driven out he goes to find him. This is the good news. This is the grace of God, which searches us out before we are even aware and breaks the curse of darkness. This is the rescue that pulls us out of our living hells. This is the lifeline that restores our hope. This is the light of Christ. Once you get a glimpse of that light, it cannot be unseen. And it will keep coming after you.

Jesus finds the man and says, *"Do you believe in the Son of Man?"*

He answers, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him."

Jesus says, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he."

All his life he is blind. All his days are begging. Until the day when he hears a voice tell him to go wash that mud out of his eyes in the Pool of Siloam. He obeys that voice, and now his hour has come! And while this whole day and everything that's happened is unexplainable, he sees the One now face to face and says,

"Lord, I believe." And he worships Jesus.

Amen.